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1. Fiction, English

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THE VEILED HAND.

"MR FREDERICK WICKS has inserted the following preface in a copy of his able novel, 'THE VEILED HAND,' which has recently been presented to the Queen :—

"It is the misfortune of sovereigns that they seldom see behind the mask; and, as dissimulation is a necessary part of the dishonourable in social life, few are able to penetrate below the surface of social movement until the public mind is shocked by a catastrophe. The parable here set out—the result of thirty years' observation as a journalist—dramatically portrays some of those things that man may be and man may do without transgressing a single statute either extant or possible. Reviewing the work, the author remarks that no possible preventative can be devised for nine-tenths of the wrongs done within these realms other than by the cultivation of the individual sense of honourable obligation."—*The Athenæum, Feb. 18th*, 1893.

THE VEILED HAND,

A NOVEL

OF

THE SIXTIES, THE SEVENTIES, AND THE EIGHTIES,

BY

FREDERICK WICKS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JEAN DE PALEOLOGUE

FOURTH EDITION, 3*s*. 6*d*.

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WHILE THE HISTORIAN DEALS WITH THE GROWTH OF PEOPLES AND THE MOVEMENT OF NATIONS, IT IS THE PROVINCE OF THE NOVELIST TO EXHIBIT THE DOMESTIC LIFE OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES. HIS OBJECT SHOULD BE TO GIVE PICTURES OF THE LIFE OF THE DAY, REFLECTING THE MOST STRIKING PHASES AND THE MOST STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP, THAT THE STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF THE NATION MAY BE SEEN IN THE DETAIL. IN PROPORTION AS HE DOES THIS, WITHOUT EXAGGERATION, AND YET WITH SUFFICIENT COLOURING TO MARK WITH EFFECT THE CHARACTERISTICS HE POURTRAYS, HE IS SUCCESSFUL.

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Muriel.

THE VEILED HAND.

FIRST PERIOD: THE SIXTIES.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN ALL THE WORLD WAS BEFORE HER.

ALTHOUGH the closing incidents of this story happened but the other day, in the midst of the ordinary conflict of commercial and political antagonism, it is necessary to go back five-and-twenty years to discover what may be regarded as the initial cause of those passages of human strife that have so recently agitated "the world."

It was a stolen interview at the close of a July evening in Charnock Park—a place of historic interest and rare solitude; and surely the strength of the passion that had brought the lovers to the trysting-place had been severely strained, for there was a frown upon his face, and fear and doubt upon hers. There had been meetings before this; and now a crisis had arisen.

They were both very striking in appearance, and both young. He was not twenty-two, and she was still younger by nearly a year. Her chief characteristics were gentleness and trust and self-devotion; and his, imperious command and bitter resentment towards those who thwarted him. Commonplace people would have described these attributes of his as selfishness, and some others as evidence of a proper pride; while all the world knows that a young girl, all tenderness and love and hope, is an enemy to herself when matched in strife with daring egotism.

He had thrown himself on the ground in a fit of petulance,

and was tearing up the grass in an appropriate spirit of destructiveness, while the girl stood leaning her back against a tree, with her hands clasped before her, and upon her face were signs of distress and doubt. Her anxiety gave character to a face that some might have said was too accurately modelled for everyday wear; and if the mists of passion had not obscured his sight he might have discovered in that look a key to the treasures of a heart whose nature he had never even sought to comprehend, much less to reflect in rougher characters, its passionate devotion and self-denial.

She was very beautiful. Her face was oval, and lighted with dark, lustrous eyes, that told of patience, endurance, and a capacity for self-immolation. Her dark brown hair, somewhat at variance with the fashion of pads, then prevailing, was plainly parted in the middle, and as plainly secured in a plait or knot behind. Her lips were inclined to fulness, and were strangers in expression to anything but sympathy and compassion. Her figure was slight, but of the medium height; and her whole demeanour was that of one who loved with incomparable devotion, and hoped with an abounding confidence that the love she longed for would be hers when the anger of the moment should have passed.

It did not pass readily. He rose and strode about, wildly gesticulating and muttering imprecations as he shook his fist at the heavens. Then, turning to his companion, who remained still in the same posture of anxious doubt, he cried:

"Oh, Muriel, if you did but understand the injustice that confounds me at every point you would not be so cruel as to deny me the comfort of your companionship, the soothing influence of your love."

And although these words were thrust at her reproachfully, and even with bitterness, she answered in fearful, appealing tones:

"You have my love, Geoffrey, and must always have it." And then, in accents almost of despair, she cried: "Oh, how can I help but love you."

The frown passed from his face to be replaced by a smile, not unmixed, however, with a sinister eagerness. Approaching her, he said:

"Forgive me, Muriel. I am so very miserable, and your sympathy is such sweet temptation."

He put his arm around her waist and kissed her tenderly, while she responded with a look of timid, trustful love.

Thus the phrases and the action were more in keeping with the peaceful beauty of the surroundings—the balmy air, the golden glow of the sunset, the rich foliage of the unfrequented glade, and the perfect solitude—for there were none to witness their passion and their vows but the curious deer.

He was elegant rather than handsome, with a profile that would not have been amiss sketched upon a Roman coin, but the colour and movement of life blurred the outline, and the physiognomist would have seen no beauty in a form marred by a shifting eye that fondness described as violet, and indifference as grey, and marred still more by a thin and nervous lip, that assumed many forms, betokening with invariable precision the dominant passion of the moment. This peculiarity grew more pronounced in later life, but in his youth the die had not been cast for moulding his future, and it was as yet uncertain whether restraint should curb or licence aggravate the latent evil enclosed within this graceful example of poor human nature.

"Oh, Muriel," said he after a pause, "you who love me can do much for me—very much."

He looked at her with the inquiring, longing smile of the lover, and she answered, with something of hope and rejoicing in her tones:

"You have my love, Geoffrey, as you know, and may have all the help of which I am capable, but that I fear is very little."

"And very little is needed—merely sympathy and encouragement—nothing more."

"But you will want advice in your difficulties?" she suggested inquiringly, "and you have told me often girls cannot reason."

"Nor can they," he answered decidedly, "all the world agrees on that, but they are moved to a conclusion by instinct, and your instinct is unerring. But why do we trifle? Love is not a matter of argument, nor are the actions of love regulated by the rule of three. You cannot love me, or you would give me your sympathy and your companionship."

He flung from her again; and she, all trembling, cried:

"When the time comes, Geoffrey, I shall be yours always and for all time, but you must not claim me sooner; and oh, Geoffrey," she pleaded, "you frighten me with your vehemence and your anger."

"How can I refrain from anger?" he cried. "Look at my position—my father a spendthrift, and me a younger son. What future have I, with a commission in one of the most

extravagant regiments in the service and with the income of a valet? They talk to me of 'the honour of the family,' and of 'the credit of our name,' and expect me to maintain these costly characteristics with the beggarly pittance they fling at me grudgingly, scornfully."

"We must be patient, Geoffrey."

"Why patient? I will not be patient. Nothing can be got by patience. You do not understand; you have not studied the evils of our social system, the tyranny of social custom, the harshness of a father, the brutal arrogance of an elder brother. Why should I be patient?"

He regarded her with animosity as he put the question, and she, trembling as she listened, was struck dumb with apprehension, not for herself but for him, so wild and heedless did he carry himself.

"Ah, Muriel," he added bitterly, as it reproaching her for her silence, "you know little of the injustice of the world and the need for mutual help or you would not regard my sufferings with such indifference."

She looked at him amazed and even horrified. No sign was written on his face of the love and sympathy he claimed of her. His eyes flashed, his lips were drawn, and his hair lay disordered on his temples. He was possessed with an impotent rage—or was he acting?

The change in his companion from blank amazement to a sense of weakness and distress was quickly followed by complete dejection. She buried her face in her hands, and sinking to the ground, she gave vent to her misery in violent sobs, made more distressing by her efforts to control them. The next instant he was at her side comforting her, and again an expression of sinister triumph crossed his face before he lifted her fair forehead to the light and kissed it with every mark of passionate fervour.

What could she do but nestle in his arms, and at his bidding stay the ready tears? It was not for her to question or withstand his bold, defiant manner. She wept without anger in her weakness and distress, and forgave the pain and injustice without resentment. She was only glad the storm was over, and was content to believe his protestations when he attributed his excitement to the fears he had for their future happiness if his efforts proved unavailing to exact justice from his family. And then she listened with growing pride to his brave defiance of custom, as is the

The Appeal

manner of young philosophers who are also younger sons, and thought how grand it would be to see him, as he promised he would be, in Parliament, reforming abuses and righting wrongs, and doing all the noble things that youth inspires and vested interests deny.

So, step by step, he reassured her and renewed her simple faith, and bore her, as by gentle leading, back to the point whence all the mischief had arisen. They must make haste to fly from uncongenial surroundings, harsh relatives and faithless friends, and make a new world of their own—a glorious world made still more glorious by their good deeds.

The prospect was enchanting, and they set themselves to work devising ways and means, the time and manner of departure, and the destination. They would be married in London: they would journey to Paris: and they would ask nobody's permission. Said he:

"Let me urge you, Muriel, in the name of our ambition in well-doing, to listen to my pleadings! Do not let us risk success by taking others into our confidence."

"May I not tell my aunt?" she asked.

"Why should you? She has no love for you."

"I think she loves me in her way."

"Then it's not a nice way. She would only tell your uncle, and then there would be an end to our arrangements."

Muriel became concerned, and her companion went on:

"Our course is very clear. You have to settle what day we shall go to London, and we have nothing to do but go. Next day I will get a licence, and after that we will be married whenever you please."

She shook her head. She could not give her reason, but she doubted. Instantly he rose to his feet, and a slight tremor of annoyance passed over his face and hovered round his mouth. The movement was far more dangerous than the more violent demonstration of passion, because it was altogether real. He turned to her and said in slow measured and masterful tones:

"I am sorry, Muriel, if it cannot be; but it can be no other way than I say. I will not meet your uncle nor your aunt. You say you do not wish to meet them in the future, therefore you can have no regard for them. You have no other relatives. You are your own mistress. Come,

and the future shall be as you wish it. Refuse, and let us both be miserable. Is it to be farewell?"

Again she buried her face in her hands. The unerring instinct with which he had credited her and all other women was wrestling desperately within her; and like a poor hunted thing, as indeed she was, she searched her weary mind if haply in the tumult of her passion she could find some manner of escape if only for a time; but another and a stronger power pressed her forward with irresistible force, and in defiance of the instinct of self-preservation, regardless of conventional barriers and in sheer desperation, she thrust out her arms and cried, but still with her head averted and half bowed down:

"Oh, Geoffrey, deal mercifully with me; I cannot help but love you!"

He stepped forward and raised her gently by the hand.

So the victory was won, and drying her tears in silence, she rested her head upon his shoulder, with all resistance to his will for ever at an end. The day, the place, the very hour were all determined in a few minutes, for the waning sun had warned them Muriel was late. And away she ran, hurrying as if for dear life and in fear of rebuke at home, but full of hope and promise of great joy; and now and then, as she skurried over the uneven ground, she looked back for yet another last glimpse of Geoffrey, waving his hat as much in triumph as in encouragement and farewell. She loved him and she had promised, and therefore had no more room for doubts. She thought as little of his motives as the wondering deer, far away up the glade: nor perhaps did he, except that he must needs have his way when he had set his heart upon a thing. He had never asked himself, not even once, how much of truth and honesty were in his purpose, how much the juvenile philosophy of the Oxford Union had distorted his brain and dressed black selfishness in the garb of personal devotion or patriotic ambition. And what could she tell? His words, when he declaimed of social wrongs, seemed full of ripe experience, and were eloquently spoken in tones that to her were the very perfection of music.

Thus Muriel hurried on, with her full heart and her boundless devotion, to a place that was no home for love, and to kindred whose sordid aspect and companionship formed only a gloomy background for the picture she would

draw of her lover's character and ambition. Everything that was brilliant in hope and heroic in promise was his; and these, with the grand projects of his life, were now not only his but hers.

CHAPTER II.

THE SUCCESSORS TO THE POTTINGERS.

MR. CHIPPERING, the eminent haberdasher, waited in the hall of The Beeches, watch in hand, a model of punctuality and an expert in the art of rebuke, for his niece Muriel was late for prayers.

The Beeches was the name of a mansion that might with propriety be described as magnificent. The auctioneer who had put it up to knock it down to Mr. Alfred Chippering said it was "an ancient demesne and the ancestral home of the Pottingers." It was a Gothic building in good preservation, and the park in which it stood was admirably wooded. Why the Pottingers had given up their "ancestral home" and Mr. Alfred Chippering had taken it, was due to the fact that the Pottingers had not attended to their business, which was landowning, and that Mr. Chippering, wholesale haberdasher and warehouseman, had attended to his.

The rise and progress of the Chipperings was coincident with the decay and fall of the Pottingers. When Mr. Chippering, a raw, ungainly youth of penurious habits, was rejoicing in the pride of an employment producing three-and-sixpence a week, as messenger to a suburban draper, the last of the Pottingers was acting on the truly Pottinger theory that it was his duty to himself, his family and society, to spend ten thousand á year, regardless of his revenues; and when, in the plenitude of his commercial successes, Mr. Chippering was entering into possession of The Beeches, the contemporary Pottinger was perambulating Pall Mall, the Park and Piccadilly, a pensioner of some less prodigal branch of the family. Here, and in the clubs, which he still frequented, he day by

day deplored the decadence of the Empire, as exemplified by the special circumstance of his being no longer the possessor of revenues he had dissipated. And so the wheel of fortune revolves upon its axis, and with inexorable justice illustrates the consequences of folly and the triumphs of thrift.

Chippering was a little man, bald on the forehead and crown of the head, with a frill of whisker and beard round his face, but otherwise clean shaven. He wore a high collar, a satin necktie of complicated design, with a diamond pin in it, a white waistcoat, and a black frock coat, very long in the skirt. He was a shopwalker, every inch of him, but he had supplanted the Pottingers, as shopwalkers who attend to their business do.

The accumulation of money is not difficult, if men would but keep to simple methods and eschew ambition. To concentrate the mind, the heart, and the very soul, within the simple square of the multiplication table, and avoid the fascination of geometrical progression as represented by the fables of the Stock Exchange; to restrict one's dissipation to the pursuit of knowledge in the suburban lecture hall, and subdue the tendency to encourage social aspirations are the leading principles with which the huckster guides himself with petty steps to fortune; and then he dies with the glorious knowledge that he is worth so much. Mr. Chippering was approaching sixty, with the happy consciousness that he had become rich without a stain upon his commercial character. He was one of the first haberdashers who had discovered the enticing properties of elevenpence three farthings as compared with the unbroken shilling, and he had once been known to give utterance to a smart saying: "Don't talk to me of the nimble ninepence," said he, "give me the frolicsome farthing," and the pursuit of the frolicsome farthing became the passion of his life.

Although in the early days the influence of the multiplication table was tried upon the frolicsome farthing in a single establishment, the Pottinger mansion would not have been won without more extensive operations. Chippering, however, had always an eye for encouraging pushing young men; and the pushing young men used to go forth from the Chippering warehouse and settle in improving towns—some as partners of existing haberdashers, and some as newly established warehousemen, whose stock was Chippering's, and whose profits mainly became Chippering's; and the frolicsome farthing in the case of failure was the principal creditor. It became, in course of time, a question in the Chippering mind whether

failure was not more profitable than the success of those pushing young men, for after one misfortune they always began again on harder terms, resulting in more abundant accumulations to the parent establishment, which in time became a sort of octopus, so far-reaching, tenacious, and ravenous were its habits.

Thus it had come to pass that Alfred Chippering was able to absorb The Beeches, and in the hall of The Beeches he waited, in a white waistcoat and long frock coat, precisely as if he had been walking the shop, and quite unlike an ancestral Pottinger, but withal a paragon of punctuality, eager to do his duty by his niece on this July evening, and remonstrate with her as became an uncle who was not a Pottinger.

Mrs. Chippering was in the drawing-room, tall and angular, with side curls and combs of imitation tortoiseshell, surmounted by a lace cap, decorated with lilac, and wearing a dark green alpaca dress of severe cut, for Mrs. Chippering had been all her life engaged in restraining the frolicsome farthing within the barrier of the Chippering threshold.

Miss Chippering was there too, aged twenty-five, and still romantic, for although her mouth was large and straight, and her cheeks were a little puffy, she had a glistening grey eye that sparkled at the mere mention of knights in armour or their modern equivalent, and looked forward to an elopement as the hope of her life. She had been theoretically familiar with ladies' bowers, guitars and silken ladders, from early childhood; and had nurtured a poetic nature on current literature in three volumes and penny numbers. She was even now, as they waited Muriel for prayers, reading "The Last Love" with painful shudderings. Her name was Amy. She was short of stature, after her father, with light brown hair, after her mother, and she was given to much sighing, being still unsought.

But Mr. Chippering waited in vain: for Muriel had found her way through the by-paths into the conservatory, put her hat upon a chair, and stood just outside the drawing-room entrance to the conservatory, waiting the summons for prayers. And this had happened because austerity breeds cunning and mechanical devotion subterfuge and dissimulation. The frolicsome farthings had opened the Pottinger portals, but they were still commonplace copper.

Among the expedients had recourse to by Mrs. Chippering for restraining the frolicsome farthings within the Chippering coffers had been the newspaper, daily or weekly. It was

cheaper as a covering material even than job lots, for no matter how "enormous" the sacrifice of the haberdasher they were poor job lots that did not fetch three farthings a yard. So newspapers were used to cover the drawing-room pictures, and protect the paint of the Venetian blinds, and save the mantel board from being marked by the ornaments; and every morning and evening when summoned to prayers the three domestics each bore her own newspaper to sit upon, that the

garments of the kitchen should not soil the chairs of the drawing-room.

The patience of Mr. Chippering being exhausted, the bell was rung and the three bearers of newspapers appeared at one door, as Muriel entered at the other, to the confusion of the head of the house and her own complete evasion of all questioning. In a very few minutes she escaped to her own room to look out on the night and dream of the morrow.

. . . . . .

Who can describe for the comprehension of man the marvellous beauty of the horizon looked upon by a girl whose tender feet are just stepping on the threshold of the great

world? It is all golden, just veiled by an azure mist—an atmosphere suggestive of the opal, iridescent, fugitive, dazzling. It is nothing definite, nothing tangible, nothing even dimly visible to be spoken of in common speech, but much that for beauty is incomparable, for purity immaculate, for hope indelible. It is all without blemish; it is essentially to be desired; it is a haven from all distresses, a rest from all fatigue, a glorious sanctuary, perchance for indolence, for the laving of hands in fragrant waters, for the inhaling of sweet odours.

It was all this and more in the dream of Muriel, looking out upon the hazy landscape, where the distant trees broke the starry sky line. Even her lover's passion, anger, distress, injustice, all were glozed over with a sheen of glorious exultation, for were these invectives and declamations not strong and great, were they not grand, and hers? Were not these dread emotions provoked by her and because of her, and was not she alone of all the world the only one who could allay the passion of her lover's heart? In very deed it was so; and all these upheavings of a strong man's soul were hers—her possession, her creation—and she was proud, and gloried in the resplendent future.

It is so the mirage attracts, for the colours are strong and sometimes brilliant, although perhaps a little garish to the sober and the *blasé* in their splendid flickerings and gyrations.

CHAPTER III.

AMY CHIPPERING IS PROVOKED TO ENVY.

MR. CHIPPERING was shaving when next morning the partner of his triumphs and his cares invaded the sanctuary of the razor, with trouble writ upon her countenance, and bearing a paper in her hand.

There is scarcely anything in the whole conglomerate of human affairs associated with so many emotions as the act of shaving. It is dangerous and troublesome, yet it is one of the earliest ambitions of youth, and few who have experienced its miseries ever relinquish the fascination it exercises. It is a solemn, serious, and in many cases a secret rite. It is always a silent function, and inopportune intrusion is frequently followed by a catastrophe, anathema, and even blood. It is not, therefore, amazing that Mr. Alfred Chippering was startled by the reflection in his glass of a wild-looking head decorated with curl-papers and a frilled nightcap, that he cut himself, that he used bad language when he was able to speak, and that Mrs. Chippering exhibited a ready penitence.

"My dear Mrs. Chip, why do you do these things?" he asked querulously. "You know I cannot bear anyone near me when I'm shaving."

"Well, dear, I couldn't help it."

"My dear, don't be absurd; you could help it."

"I couldn't, dear; Muriel's run away."

"Well, that's some consolation," said the haberdasher, fitting on a piece of court plaster.

"My dear, how can you say it's a consolation?"

"How? Why, if she's run away, she's off our hands, isn't she? Surely that's a blessing. We've no more responsibility."

He made this remark holding on to his chin, with the piece of court plaster under his forefinger.

"But think of the example to Amy, dear."

"Don't trouble yourself, she won't follow it. What's the girl run away for?"

"To be married, she says."

"Excellent! Any address?"

"Not a hint."

"Very good. Thank God that's off our minds."

"Wretch!" exclaimed the lady, and left the room.

"Now, Mrs. Chip's a curious sort of woman," soliloquised her spouse, still holding on to the sticking-plaster, but withal in a kindly and cheerful humour. "What can she mean by starting these curious feelings towards the girl? She's nothing to do with her. The girl is on my side of the house, and I'm the person to have feelings about her disappearance, but I haven't, not a rap. No!"

The soliloquy was interrupted by the process of dressing. Mr. Chippering took up his necktie. It was a curious structure. Striped silk stretched on canvas and contrived to represent a knot, in which a pin was placed under the pretence that it was holding it together, while as a matter of fact the whole arrangement was a modern make-believe necktie, designed to conceal flannel shirts, and made by the gross with rigid accuracy. The thing seemed to please the haberdasher, however, and gave his thoughts a new turn. He balanced it in his hand and called it "a good line," which in the language of his kind means a large order or a successful piece of business.

"Ah!" said he. "I wish I had as many guineas as I have sold neckties." Then, continuing his ruminations, he said: "So, she's gone. Gone to be married. Gone for good. That's all right. Now, Mrs. Chip *is* queer, but I suppose she don't know."

What she did not know was that a little matter of three thousand pounds had come into her husband's hands with his niece, without writing or obligation, and while on the one hand the three thousand pounds had proved very useful in business, it had justified the commercial conscience of Mr. Chippering in treating his niece as one of his own household equally with his daughter. Similarly his commercial conscience enabled him to regard her sudden departure as complete absolution from anything in the nature of claims or responsibility on his part, with the additional advantage that so long as she remained

a fugitive and undiscovered he was still further absolved from doing what other less accurate people would regard as common justice, by handing over the capital sum. The idea of going in pursuit or taking measures for her recovery never entered his head.

"Going to be married," said he, pursuing his reflections. "Then she'll have a husband to look after her. That will be excellent. He'll have to keep her. But perhaps she isn't going to get married: perhaps she's making a mistake. So much the worse for her, and so much the better for me: she won't come back."

By this time he had got his coat on and had made a final examination of his court plaster. He looked at himself in the glass from top to toe, and seeming to approve the general appearance, though, as a matter of art, it is doubtful whether anyone else would, he went down to breakfast uncommonly well satisfied with himself and his affairs commercial and domestic.

His amiability was not reciprocated in the breakfast-room, Mrs. Chippering's anger had not subsided; it had increased, even to the point of speechlessness. This calamitous condition of things had arisen from the perversity of her daughter, who had exhibited the most extraordinary irritation on hearing the news of her cousin's reprehensible behaviour. It is true she had expressed her indignation, but it was the protest of envy rather than of condemnation, and took expression in the monosyllable "Beast," which was not only unladylike and inconsistent with the dignity of the family of The Beeches, but conveyed too accurately the condition of her mind on the subject of clandestine interviews and elopements. Though hard and unsympathetic, Mrs. Chippering was really anxious about the welfare of those for whom she was in any way responsible, and was honestly distressed at the discovery of the morning and the ungracious reflections of her household on the subject. She did not reason about the matter; she could not even express her anxiety in becoming language, and may not have been conscious of it as the definite cause of her distress; but the feeling was within her, and coloured all her thoughts and conversation for the time being, and made her thoroughly miserable.

Chippering, on the contrary, was elated, remarked upon his appetite, which was prodigious, read his letters, which seemed to be pleasing, and discussed politics as disclosed in the morn-

ing paper. The absence of response failed to damp his spirits, and he resolutely shut his eyes to the moroseness of his daughter and the rising anger of his wife.

The difficulty of carrying on a one-handed conversation, even though assisted by a morning paper and half-a-dozen letters, was enormous, but the little man maintained a running commentary upon public affairs, with amazing perseverance, and every now and then asked his wife a question upon some out-of-the-way subject, looking at her as if he would say: "I know what you're thinking about, but I decline to acknowledge that I do; and begin upon it if you dare."

Nevertheless, in course of time, Mrs. Chippering did begin upon it, with slightly stumbling speech to be sure, showing her nervousness; and Amy listened with pent-up anger, as if her cousin had eloped with the only remaining knight of chivalry in all the world, and had left her in chains in the castle of desolation for all time.

"Do you intend to take *no* steps to find your niece?" asked Mrs. Chippering.

"I shall expect a letter to-morrow, my dear," was the unconcerned reply.

"Is it possible you feel *no* anxiety?" inquired Mrs. Chippering.

"Now look at that!" exclaimed the haberdasher, pointing to a portion of his necktie, a long narrow strip covered with a row of eyelet holes, that had broken out from behind the formal decoration and exhibited itself in all its naked mechanism. "That's the third time this has occurred, and with two different neckties. Most annoying. I've got a thousand gross of them, Mrs. Chip, and if they go like this they'll be a dead loss."

He was genuinely annoyed. His concern took the form of mental arithmetic. He worked out, with surprising rapidity, the precise number of farthings he would lose if he had to make a reduction to his retailers on account of this distressing failure in eyelet holes, and the domestic misfortune was instantly thrust out of all possible regard, and reduced to its proper proportions as a thing of no consequence as compared with neckties.

"Why, it's a dreadful business. I must go up to town about it at once. Think, my dear, a thousand gross, and liable to go like this."

"How can they be a dead loss," asked Mrs. Chippering

snappishly, "when the things have to be sold before the people find out they're bad?"

"Do you think," he responded, "I'm going to have our house associated with a reputation for obviously defective neckties? We have a conscience, Mrs. Chip, and don't sell bad goods if we know it."

Mrs. Chippering's anger expressed itself in a spasm and a grunt, followed by the crushing reflection that it was a pity her husband didn't bring his conscience home with him, to which Mr. Chippering replied with "Drat the woman!" and, full of anxiety, arising from his discovery, he hurried out of the room to make preparations for departure. As The Beeches was fully two miles from the railway station, he sent a message to his coachman to have the carriage ready at once. Back came the answer in two minutes that Slant was very sorry, but master couldn't have it.

Now, what could possibly be the meaning of that message, asked Mr. Alfred Chippering, proprietor of The Beeches, wholesale haberdasher notwithstanding.

"Send Slant here. No, I'll go to him. *I'll* see what it means."

And he went, carrying with him his umbrella as indicating that he was ready to start that instant and expected to do so.

Slant was a superior person: a coachman of repute, and with dignity becoming his office. His employer found him in his shirt sleeves, with his hands in the pockets of his drab breeches, and chewing a straw as he stood on the threshold of the stable. His hat and drab gaiters gave character to his appearance, and he was a figure fully in keeping with the magnificent proportions of the offices over which he presided. Mr. Alfred Chippering discovered a sense of modesty and bashfulness as he approached him, but put on an air of bravado as he asked:

"Well, Slant, why can't I have my carriage?"

"No horses, sir."

"What?"

"No horses, I say, sir. One's cast a shoe, and t'other's got a cold and is off his feed."

"Can't you get the shoe put on?"

"No, sir; this is the day the farrier does the Pilton horses, and he won't be back till seven to-night."

All these statements were delivered with stern deliberation.

Slant's position was unassailable, and the irritation of the haberdasher was becoming acute.

"Do you mean to tell me the Marquis is too ill to go out?" he asked.

The horses were named the Marquis and the Marchioness, and the haberdasher liked to name them whenever he had a chance. He liked the sound of the names; and as he rolled them out he felt as if he were intimately associated with the peerage at large.

"I wouldn't 'a said so if it wasn't true," replied Slant, with a touch of reproachfulness in his voice. "The Marquis is a val'able horse, and I wouldn't take the responsibility of 'aving 'im out in 'is present state. I'll say he's a val'able horse, Mr. Chippering," he repeated, with a slight turn of the head, and intimating thereby that he was making a great concession in admitting the excellence of anything on the premises.

Mr. Chippering failing to observe this, asked:

"Now, don't you think it's a very extraordinary thing that with a couple of good horses in the stable I never seem to be able to drive when I want to?"

"No, Mr. Chippering, I don't," said Slant, with a patronising manner. "I don't consider it nowise extraordinary, not when you've only got two horses. Two horses ain't enough to keep yer goin'. Yer see," he continued, with growing importance, "this 'ere's a eight-stall stable, and there's two loose-boxes besides, and there's accommodation for a coachman and three grooms, and that's the kind o' establishment as is nateral and proper, and what a gentleman as 'as The Beeches ought to keep up."

Mr. Chippering's bashfulness and modesty at this point approached humiliation and shame. He found himself in the presence of one of the most inexorable of British institutions, a veritable stone wall that his head was not strong enough to level and his short legs unfitted to scale. Had he been in one of his many warehouses, standing upon a pedestal of cotton reels, he would have made short work of the menial Slant,

chewing his straw, scratching his head, and delivering himself with all the confidence of a professor on the social necessities of The Beeches, and pointing out to the wealthy haberdasher how very far short he was of the Pottingers in point of tone and style and recognition of the dignity and status of the Family Coachman. As it was, he felt wholly unable to make an adequate answer. He looked askance at his monitor, and took refuge in a question. He was on the eve of a sarcasm reflecting on the professor's presumption, but even this indication of a rebellious spirit vanished, and in the mildest accents he queried:

"You want more horses?"

"Yes, sir, that's it. A pair of good stout cobs, fifteen 'and, and a pony for the luggage cart, which we ain't got at present. That would do, as you don't ride; and a groom and a 'elper."

Chippering was about to retort, but a glance at Slant's hat caused him to turn aside biting his lip; and with a long-drawn breath, he walked across the court with as much appearance of unconcern as he could muster.

A demand from one of his managers for three more shop-walkers and another dozen "young persons" for the counter was to him about the measure of the extravagant demand made on him by his Master of the Horse; but having assumed a position involving a Master of the Horse, his practical common sense told him he should concede his Master's demands, or resist them, or altogether retreat from the position. The inevitable three courses were open to him, but his mind, at the sight of Slant's hat, was unequal to the task of determining which he would take.

Slant's hat had been the subject of rumour in the household of The Beeches for some time past. Slant had expressed his opinion on the question involved to his wife Mary, during the repose of the evening, in the rooms over the coach-house, as the hat hung upon a peg in full view of Slant, in his shirt sleeves, smoking his pipe, and much disturbed in his mind on the subject. The hat, as it hung upon the peg when the great question was first raised in the mind of Slant, was adorned by a cockade. Mr Chippering observed at the close of his interview with Slant that the cockade was gone, and he knew from this that Slant's mind had been made up on the subject, and that he had, moreover, taken action.

"Mary," said Slant, on the memorable evening when he took action, "I've always behaved honest and straight, and

I ain't a-going to begin otherwise now. That cockade has got to come out."

And out it came. It was carefully wrapped in paper and put away in a drawer with the company spoons, to be produced when required, if Mr. Chippering should ever be bold enough to ask for it, which Slant assured Mary, from what he had seen of him, he very much doubted.

The resolution was painful, but Slant was firm. From his earliest boyhood he had protested against the assumption of the cockade by the unauthorised; he had scoffed at transgressors, and revelled in the distinction which his status had accorded him. The sacredness of the right to the cockade had become an article of faith with him, and being an article of faith, he would stand by it at all cost, and with as much firmness as if it represented the whole thirty-nine articles rolled into one. His status was depreciated, and the cockade must go.

Slant's views on the cockade and the presumption of the haberdasher, who, poor man, had sinned through invincible ignorance, had filtered upwards from the domestics to the ears of Mrs. Chippering, and had been communicated by her, with much misgiving, to her spouse. He received the correction with meekness, but being unused to confession, brushed the matter aside as an annoyance that had best be forgotten. Slant, however, did not forget. The haberdasher was rudely reminded of the stern morality of his coachman by a practical rebuke, which heaped up the measure of his morning's distress, already full to the brim with defective neckties, a chiding wife, and an insufficient equipage. The disappearance of his niece was a small matter, but these were flaws in the pedestal and crown of his ambition and must be mended.

A thousand gross of imperfectly devised neckties meant not making money. An insatiable coachman meant getting rid of money. The incident of this second evil was the cause of the first, and both were the fruits of manorial proprietorship, with humiliation in a stableyard thrown in. Mr. Alfred Chippering ruminated on the situation, while being driven to the railway station in a hired fly from the Bull Inn, and he mentally added the bill for the fly to his calculations. He ruminated all the way to town in the railway train, and reminded himself that he travelled first-class, and put the difference between that and third-class down to the

same heavy account of manorial proprietorship. The loss of his niece was not much of a discount from the sum total of what had befallen him; and enduring to the full the misery resulting from frustrated hope, he resolved to let The Beeches and return to his warehouse: for while the spending of money gives pleasure to many, the accumulation of it is to the few a joy inexpressible.

CHAPTER IV.

PURSUITS VARIOUS.

THOUGH not in pursuit, the haberdasher followed on the trail of his niece. Early risers had remarked a high dog-cart on the London road, drawn at a smart pace by a sixteen-hand bay horse of surprising action. There were two young men in front and a groom behind, he would have been told if he had asked, but he had other things to think about—neckties and coachmen and horses of his own, and sundry urgent and imperious questions of social economy grouped round an initial problem of far-reaching application—why, indeed, a man cannot make money effectively and also spend it properly at the same time. Mr. Alfred Chippering had got his first glimpse of the fact that it takes a man's whole time to make "an appearance," that in fact it was easy for Chippering to supplant Pottinger, but not by any means easy to be both Chippering and Pottinger at the same time.

Mr. Alfred Chippering therefore made no inquiries leading to the knowledge of the presence of the bay horse of surprising action near his park gates, about half-past five that morning. Geoffrey was there, dressed in a heavy drab coat with large buttons, and holding another on his arm—a thorough-going driving coat, that made his slim figure look as bulky as a stage coach driver's. He wore a low crowned felt hat, and round his neck was a blue silk muffler. He was of

course before his time, and of course impatient and inclined to be angry.

"What's the time now, Trinder?" he asked of the groom who stood at the horse's head.

"Five twenty-five, sir," said Trinder, sullenly and immovably, and standing in front of the horse with his hands clasped, as if he had been doing duty in Belgravia.

Geoffrey Delfoy started impatiently.

"How do you know without looking?" he asked.

"Counted, sir," said Trinder, still without moving, and apparently without any intention whatever of moving until official duties required it. He was a stolid boy, with eyes that seldom opened wide, and a mouth that drooped at the left corner even in this time of blooming youth, for his cheeks were ruddy and mental qualities had not had time to work upon the nerves and muscles of the face and show to all whose eyes could see the shape and quality of his latent soul. Geoffrey liked him because he was sullen and because he made no friends, and because he didn't whistle or laugh and was generally silent.

There was a rustling and a swift pattering of feet, a closing of wide open arms, a swift embrace, and then some eager whispering. The coat was a necessity for warmth, he said—just like his own, with thick velvet collar and large buttons, and also the heavy blue muffler and a shooting cap instead of the large Leghorn. It took only three-quarters of a minute to arrange matters, or rather to hurry them forward with a rush, and they were off, while Trinder ran behind and sprang at full trot to his step, for with all his sullenness Trinder would rather have died than take his seat except at full trot.

"Oh, Geoffrey, I am so fearful," said Muriel, as they started on the road.

"Of the pace?" asked Geoffrey. "It's not nice to loiter."

"No, not that. I am trusting to you—oh, so much."

"Yes, dearest—steady, Peter," he added, as the horse seemed to swerve about three inches to the right, and perhaps the off rein had something to do with it.

"We are quite safe, but we must not talk just now, till Peter is quieter," he said.

Away they sped through the pearl grey mist of the early morning at a good ten miles an hour. The road was good, and the situation exhilarating. The glinting of the sunlight through the thick plantations and the scent from the teeming earth were sufficient for the time to distract the imagination

and dissipate anxiety; but there were every now and then some sad misgivings, and the gentle face under the shooting cap was very grave, for the little woman was revolving hopes and fears and framing phrases that she would speak to Geoffrey, and yet dared not, for love forbade her to doubt, and had she not already said she trusted him?

They breakfasted at a riverside inn, where the people rose early, and where the landlady knew how to make an omelette. The breakfast was an anxious time. Those phrases that Muriel dared not speak shaped themselves continually in all manner of ways, and intruded themselves between the eggs and the buttered toast and the cup of tea, and most of all when the salt was spilled; but Geoffrey's devotion was beyond praise, and he maintained such a bustling activity in the matter of breakfast, and seeing the horse was attended to, and asking Muriel whether she was sure she was quite warm, and whether she would now like to go without the overcoat and resume her Leghorn hat, and in all things behaved with such consummate propriety and such perfect tenderness that she began to think her anxieties reprehensible, and resolved to be cheerful and bright and altogether hopeful.

She then discovered that subsidiary to these more personal feelings were others involving consideration for those she had left behind. Anxiety as to the pain they would feel at her departure began to assert itself as concern for her own future was dispelled; and although, if she had been able to analyse her past relations with the family of The Beeches, she would have found little upon which to ground a case against herself—absconding was a terrible fact. Moreover, there had always been a tacit sense of relationship between her and her aunt, that found expression in simple acts of consideration, and almost of tenderness, uncouth and graceless on the part of her aunt, but understood by her, and cherished as much as if they had been animated with the most abundant expressions of devotion. Muriel sighed as she thought of Aunt Chippering, and hoped it would not be long before she could allay the anxiety she knew she must be feeling.

Geoffrey heard the sigh, being very much on the alert, and suspecting it arose from feelings far nearer a matter for his concern, hurried to Muriel's side, and giving her a sounding kiss, declared she looked more charming than ever he had seen her, and bustled about with a breezy air, making final preparations for again getting on the road.

It was now approaching eight o'clock, on a fine summer's morning, so the cart was brought round, and with a cheerful good-bye to the landlady who knew how to make omelettes, Geoffrey gave Peter the word and away they went.

There was just enough wind to temper the heat of the sun, the breakfast had been a good one, and an equable physical condition had made Muriel more amenable to the cheery influences inseparable from a smart drive in agreeable company.

"Now, Muriel, I see my way. I begin to live!" said Geoffrey. "From this day," he exclaimed, "I shall date every-one of my future triumphs."

This superb egotism was responded to by Muriel's most trusting smile, without the remotest shadow of doubt, and with unalloyed gladness.

"See me insult Peter," said Geoffrey, with genuine gaiety. "See how indignant he will be," and he smacked the whip near the horse's shoulder.

Peter gave a lunge and shook his head by way of protest at the mere suggestion of a whip in his case, and Geoffrey chuckled with pride at the growing pace. Then he fell to talking of the future—the cottage on the river, the chambers in town, a pair of ponies for Muriel to drive, a boat anchored at the bottom of the lawn, and all those agreeable conditions that comprise nineteenth century happiness without state.

By nine o'clock they had arrived at the railway station, where Peter and the dog-cart were left in charge of Trinder, as the rest of the journey was to be made by train.

It was a roadside station of no pretensions to business beyond shunting coal wagons on to a branch line, and had been chosen by Geoffrey for reasons which will appear hereafter, and of which speed was not the first consideration. They had a quarter of an hour to wait before the arrival of the next train, which was a subject for mutual congratulation in respect that it was not longer, and of compliment to Peter for having brought them over the ground so quickly. Geoffrey Delfoy was not as a rule given to the love or praise of animals; he regarded them, indeed, as things to be used or abused as the humour of the moment suggested, and had Muriel known him better she would have been surprised at the continuous references to Peter: his style, his action, his manifold excellences, including his price and the price that had been refused for him, all points of more or less importance, but of no consequence whatever as compared with the grave subject with

which she was battling, and that would intrude itself despite all her efforts to repress it. And if she had spoken her Geoffrey would have gaily brushed the speech aside and talked the more of Peter—and was he not *her* Geoffrey?

They took a walk on the platform, and found it deserted, with the exception of a solitary figure in the distance, a clergyman apparently, from his broad-brimmed hat, his long frock coat, and loose black cloth trousers. He had his back towards them, and was reading a newspaper. Geoffrey made a joke.

"What a pity I haven't the licence here: we might be married in the village church."

Muriel blushed and laughed, but the suggestion gave her immense satisfaction. Geoffrey had spoken of the licence, that was a great deal.

They walked along towards the broad-brimmed hat and long frock coat. Their owner turned languidly to regard them, when his face lighted up. It was a large puffy face, and seemed to require a deal of lighting up, but the sight of Delfoy excited its owner, and advancing, with a long stride and his right hand outstretched, he exclaimed:

"Delfoy, my dear friend! Impossible! A most providential meeting."

Geoffrey did not seem to think so; he retreated half a pace, and looked amazed. He observed that the stranger was slightly deformed. He seemed bigger on the right side and high-shouldered on the right side, and his right shoulder seemed to have grown out, and his right leg seemed stiff and wanting in freedom of movement. His cheeks were puffed out, and he was afflicted with a nervous twitching of the mouth.

"Ah, my dear friend," he exclaimed again, pulling himself together and crumpling the newspaper all in a heap on his breast, "you do not know me; you have forgotten me." Then, advancing as suddenly as before, he again thrust out his right hand, and with a curious contortion of his face, probably an attempt at a smile, he said in a loud whisper:

"Brill."

"What! You Brill!" cried Delfoy, with a loud laugh, that he suddenly stopped with guilty consciousness. "You *have* changed."

Brill smiled again, with more pronounced contortion, as Delfoy regarded him with a mixture of admiration and amusement, but he was careful to keep his face away from the scrutiny of Muriel after he had recognised his friend. Thus, standing at ease, very much lopsided, Brill said:

"I fear I have changed. Disappointment. Want of success. Want of recognition. But you interest me very much—very much indeed," he added, looking at Delfoy with the eye of a connoisseur in humanity, and the eye twinkled and the mouth twitched, and again he held the paper all crumpled up on his breast, as he enjoyed the sight of his friend.

Muriel was standing a little in the rear, somewhat disappointed to find the clergyman who might have married them if they had had the licence was so ill-shapen and had such odd ways. She bowed gracefully, however, and smiled when Geoffrey introduced them, and blushed when he said that his friend Brill, being in the Church, might do two forlorn lovers a good turn within the next few days. Mr. Brill said he would be much pleased, with a sly smirk at Muriel, who had become very happy by this time, and who, upon reflection and in view of Geoffrey's remark, thought Mr Brill, despite his curious shape and singular manner, a rather agreeable man, and also concluded that she joined with him in thinking that the meeting was quite providential.

"This is one of that class of meeting, my dear Delfoy," remarked Brill, with his head slightly on one side, away from

the high shoulder, "that makes one reflect. Do you know, I have been going over all my college acquaintances this morning one by one, and ticking them off my fingers, thus," and he used one black glove to tick off the other black fingers. "I have been ticking them off to see which would be most capable of assisting me in a matter of grave importance; and I fixed on you. I fixed on you, and here you are! Surely, now, there's something superusual in that — something that psychology has not fathomed—in our being drawn together at this hour, and at this curious out-of-the-way spot—a deserted railway station."

"Well, it is strange," said Delfoy, laughing, and Muriel took his arm and laughed too.

"Now, I daresay you'll be curious to learn what this grave matter is that I need your assistance in. Very simple; quite commonplace. A living. Merely that. I want somebody to apply a lever to the Archbishop of Canterbury, to give him a fillip, a nudge, a gentle reminder that genius is at his command, and your father's influence, Delfoy, is the very thing."

"Certainly, certainly," said Delfoy with alacrity, "you shall have it, Brill. We'll settle the programme on the road. You'll travel with us, and I'll make a note of the particulars."

"Right," said Mr. Brill. "I'm sure it's a providential meeting."

And on the journey he explained the difficulties he had met with in his profession, the misfortunes resulting from the neglect of genius, and the necessary blindness of Archbishops.

"You see, Delfoy, by the time a man has become an Archbishop he's done. He has been looking about him so infernally sharp all his life to get to the top of the tree that he's stone blind when he gets there, and the new genius languishes—languishes *ul*-together," he repeated, clasping his hands upon his breast, as indicating the specific genius that languished; and then, with a sudden burst of enthusiasm and a revival of the excruciating smile, he clasped Delfoy, sitting opposite to him, by the knee, and waving his left hand towards Muriel, he said: "You, Miss—ah, Miss—"

"Balmain," put in Delfoy.

"You, Miss Balmain—soon to be Mrs. Delfoy, eh?—will you join with me? Nay, you will have to join with me in watching the career of a great statesman of the future." Then, with a further instalment of the smile, he continued:

"You, Delfoy, you're the man to be envied. Politics, the platform, the broad phases of social relationships, the common, the general, the universal, it's all before you; and, if you allow us, we shall enjoy the privilege of helping to place you on the pinnacle."

Delfoy responded with a whimsical grin, no more; and the orator, claiming the privilege of eccentric pronunciation, continued:

"I have a muttive for this."

Then he paused and gazed at Delfoy admiringly.

"My muttive," he continued, "is simple. If you are on the pinnacle, the Archbishop can no longer ignore genius. He will *place* it."

"Ay, ay," said Delfoy, with the same whimsical grin on his face. "That's a bargain. The pinnacle and the Archbishop. Remember that, Muriel—and here's Paddington."

As they stepped from the train Geoffrey took Muriel nervously by the arm, and pointed down the platform at Mr. Alfred Chippering, hurrying along at a breakneck speed for the first hansom, in pursuit—not of Muriel, as Delfoy thought, but of dealers in neckties.

CHAPTER V.

DOCTORS' COMMONS.

DELFOY had made up his mind in the course of the morning that no present, however costly, would give to Muriel the satisfaction she would feel at the sight of the marriage licence. He was keenly alive to her unexpressed anxieties, and he had reasons of his own for allaying them. He accordingly set out as early as possible for Doctors' Commons, and passed under the low archway out of St. Paul's Churchyard with a vague notion that he should there find what he wanted, without, however, having any precise knowledge on the subject.

He had usually associated Doctors' Commons with the Apothecaries' Hall, the Tower of London, and the Gulf Stream, institutions of great antiquity and presumed usefulness, referred to in books and casually mentioned in conversation, but not presenting any definite ideas except that whereas the Tower of London had to do with the chopping off of heads and the Apothecaries' Hall the mending of bodies, so Doctors' Commons was a place for assisting people about to marry, and was noted for its promptitude and despatch in satisfying its customers. He was not, however, aware of the extreme anxiety of the two eminent competitors in the business, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, to procure his patronage, and he was not a little surprised to find the emissaries of these two eminent dignitaries of the Church waiting for him, under the shadow of Dean's Court, with most extraordinary foreknowledge of his intention, each with a white apron and a silk hat, and each voluble concerning the excellencies of the particular establishment he represented.

The white apron from the Bishop of London was the first to get possession of him, and he was just making up his mind, from the responses he received to inquiries, that the Bishop could do his business for him satisfactorily, when the Archbishop's man came up and cast doubts upon the extent and variety of the goods offered by his competitor, and assured the

gentleman that, if he wanted a real licence that would serve him at all points and in all contingencies, then the Archbishop was the only man who could fit him.

This embarrassed him a good deal—the more so because going up Dean's Yard with the Archbishop's man on one side and the Bishop's on the other seemed to him to convey to the passers-by the purpose of his visit; and, inasmuch as those

about to marry are, for some unaccountable reason, always regarded as fit subjects for sport and ridicule, especially to errand boys and other scoffers of tender years, he became annoyed, and therefore weak of judgment, and unable to determine whether to patronise the Primate or the local practitioner.

The disputation continued on the very doorsteps of the two competing purveyors, the strong point of the Archbishop's man being the large assortment and special character of his goods, and the strong point of the Bishop's man the fact that the gentleman could be served on the ground floor in his establishment instead of going upstairs in the other. Geoffrey's doubts were still further increased by the number of the notice board,

put all over the two entrances, and the numerous brass plates the inscriptions on which, referring to Vicars General, surrogates, proctors, and other amphibious dignitaries associated with the Law and the Church, embarrassed him to the point of exasperation. Suddenly, however, he suffered himself to be controlled by the idea that the greater would assuredly include the less, preferred the Primate, and gave the Bishop's man half-a-crown to appease his disappointment.

He was received inside by an elderly gentleman, with a bald head, a white necktie, and black garments, decorated about the waistcoat with snuff, and about the mouth with Spanish liquorice and smiles. What could he do for his visitor? A licence? Certainly. Was he one of the parties? Naturally, and necessarily, one of the parties *must* attend. Gentleman lives in the Albany? Yes. Lived there some time? Of course. No consequence where the lady lived—Timbuctoo or anywhere else, it wouldn't matter.

"Just wait one minute, sir. Pray be seated."

There was evidently a fear that the customer would go to the other shop if he were not civilly treated, for the elderly gentleman took good care to get him as far away from the door as possible, and smiled in so benign a manner, and offered him snuff with such an evident desire to please that Geoffrey felt he was in good hands, and had no regrets at his selection.

The necessary documents having been prepared, and the necessary declarations having been made, the elderly gentleman, if not so clean as the tout's white apron, was as gracious as any Archbishop could possibly be, remarked, with his blandest smile:

"Two pounds two shillings and sixpence. Yes, sir. That is all. Marry to-morrow, sir? Certainly. Before twelve o'clock with this licence. If you want to marry this evening, sir, you must go upstairs. Proctor on the premises. Everything provided. To-morrow will do? Certainly, sir. Good afternoon."

The elderly gentleman showed him out, all smiles and bows, conveying the general impression that he would feel obliged if his customer would send all his friends to his warehouse, where the goods were of the "best possible quality, economical in price, and served with promptitude and despatch."

Delfoy, thinking to avoid the touts in the court leading to St Paul's Churchyard, went in the other direction, but was

chagrined to meet the cormorants who had before disputed possession of him calmly gazing down Carter's Lane, having taken a turn in The Swan with Two Necks to drink his health, but they vouchsafed him only a friendly nod, having no further interest in a man whose fate in all probability was fixed for their time at least.

CHAPTER VI.

AN IMPROVING NEIGHBOURHOOD.

MURIEL was looking from a French window upon the river Thames, with Waterloo Bridge on the left, the shot tower opposite, the Charing Cross railway bridge on the right, and immediately in front and below her was the place where Cleopatra's needle now stands, but at that time all ooze and shiny rivulets at low water, edged by squalid and rickety sheds, dilapidated stables, wrecks of warehouses, and unwholesome gutters.

The French window looked from Romley's Hotel, now no more, swept out of existence by the necessities of the speculating contractor and the syndicated middleman. Romley's Hotel was a congeries of old-fashioned domestic dwellings at the bottom of Sarum Street, joined together on the inside by variously contrived doorways through the party walls, and on the outside by a coat of red paint, and the name Romley's Hotel in very large white letters, which grew in size and especially in breadth as each new house was added to the warren.

Romley's Hotel had commenced over the way, where the late Mr. Romley had appropriated three houses, and then had walked across the street and appropriated four more, of which the end house with the French windows was the last acquisition, and by far the most distinguished. It had been built in the time of the early Georges, when an architect set about the business of building a house with a sense of responsibility and not as a bricklayer. This part of Romley's Hotel was a house of curves, with a well staircase and decorated ceilings, with

alcoves for the reception of statuary, and rooms in suites, of all variety of shapes and sizes, devious corridors and unexpected passages, but all appropriate, graceful, and of unquestionable utility. It had mahogany doors and high chimney-pieces and walls painted in panels.

Romley's Hotel, with its seclusion and quiet in the heart of London, was very popular with those who discovered it. They always returned to it, and always went to the same house. If their particular house was full, they went to another grudgingly and under protest, and only on condition that they should go back to their own room in their own house at the earliest possible moment. And the chief reason it was so popular as an hotel was because it was not an elaborate mechanical contrivance for numbering the visitors and never knowing where to find them when they were wanted.

Muriel had a companion as she looked from the French window across the broad and busy river—a woman, not much older than herself and almost as pretty, but of a different type. It was Mrs. Romley, a fair and graceful little widow, with the sweetest smile, Muriel thought, she had ever seen. She was an elder sister in five minutes, and almost a confidante, but not quite.

Mrs. Romley had known Geoffrey Delfoy as an occasional visitor, and when he brought Muriel to her and asked her to take care of her for a few days, she said she would and did. She wondered a little, and framed a question or two which she never put, and came to the wise conclusion that it was her duty to do her duty as far as her own responsibilities were concerned, and not to commence the business of conscience keeper for her visitors, or become the self-appointed censor of their acts. How much of worldly wisdom, delicacy of feeling, or gentleness and timidity, entered into and controlled this conclusion it would be difficult to say, and perhaps all these several influences weighed, but whatever the motives, Mrs. Romley, with the sweetest of manners, took Muriel in hand, and made her feel in every sense at ease.

Geoffrey was not a resident himself at Romley's Hotel on this occasion. He proposed to stay at his chambers, and he was absent on a mission of the gravest importance as Muriel looked from the French window wondering how long he would be.

He had a great many things to see to.

He had, in the first place, so he told Mrs. Romley, to get

Miss Balmain's luggage, and before they had done inspecting the river it came in the shape of a large portmanteau and a lady's dressing-bag. Actuated by the same caution as prevented her making Mrs. Romley a confidante, she treated the arrival of the luggage as a matter of course, and rejoiced over the contents in private. The dressing-bag contained, besides the whole series of silver-topped scent-bottles and ivory-handled brushes, two dozen pairs of gloves, and a whole series of silk handkerchiefs of varied designs and utility. The portmanteau, which the uninitiated might have supposed from its appearance had been in Miss Balmain's possession for a year at least, though she had never seen it before, was filled with a complete bride's trousseau of the most perfect description, and excited in her the liveliest satisfaction. Following this came two or three parcels of wrappers, and about four in the afternoon Geoffrey himself rushed into the room in desperate haste with a ridiculously small piece of paper considering its vast significance, licensing in all due form a marriage between Geoffrey Leuchars Delfoy and Muriel Balmain. That *was* delightful.

They then went out shopping for two hours, and by the time they returned to Romley's Muriel was not conscious of being in need of anything she had left behind her at The Beeches, and was altogether in the most jubilant spirits, trying on and packing, and in desperate haste for fear the bugle call, as Geoffrey had said, should sound before she was quite ready.

The bugle call, however, was not sounded for three or four days. Sundry necessary arrangements had to be made; the Horse Guards had to be pacified, the Army Agents to be arranged with in the matter of letters of credit, and although these points could, in ordinary circumstances, be disposed of in a few hours, Muriel's experience was limited, and Geoffrey's assertion was quite sufficient for her.

But on the third day Trinder arrived in Sarum Street with his master's baggage on a cab, at seven o'clock in the morning, added Muriel's to it, and went off to the railway station for the Calais boat with a more than usually morose aspect. He didn't complain of anything; he didn't use bad language when the boots at Romley's dropped his end of a large trunk and nearly dislocated Trinder's arm; he scarcely spoke a word during the whole of the proceedings beyond the absolutely necessary, and when he did make a remark it came out of the left-hand corner of his mouth as if parting his lips were a waste

of energy. The Romley boots wondered whether he was in training for solitary confinement, and what might be his particular fancy in the way of crime. Muriel had a decided aversion to him, but did not express it; she even rebuked herself for a want of amiability when she shrank on his approach.

Shortly after Trinder had left Sarum Street there arrived a smart brougham, driven by a smart coachman, who circled round the lamp-post at the bottom of the street, peering at the houses and wondering which was his destination. He handed in a letter at No. 11, and remounted his box. The letter was for Muriel, and from Geoffrey Delfoy.

"Drive as fast as you can, dear Muriel," he wrote, "to the gateway of the Horse Guards. I shall be there, and there's not a moment to lose. G. D."

It was a case of hurry and bustle, without hesitation or reflection. But what could Geoffrey Delfoy be doing at the Horse Guards at 7.30 A.M.? And yet what should Muriel know of the habits of the Commander-in-Chief, of his staff, or of an officer about to leave on a month's tour? She made all haste; Mrs. Romley saw her off, and smiled as she did so, but as the door closed she sighed and looked very, very sad.

Geoffrey was waiting for her, looking very nice, she thought, with a light coat on his arm and a flower in his buttonhole.

"To the Green Man," said he to the coachman, "as fast as you can go," and they were off.

"The Green Man?" said Muriel, amazed. "What's that?"

"A public house—the only place he knows. The church is not far from there."

He spoke with suppressed excitement. She felt his hand trembling as he held hers between them, and he seemed to have become suddenly pale.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

He shuddered, then set his teeth and shook himself together. He tried to smile as he said:

"I'm overstrained, I think. I've done a great deal during these last three days, and now it's over and we are here on the road, dear Muriel, I collapse."

The Horse Guards had been worrying him, she was sure. So

she comforted him, and congratulated him on being free from further anxieties, and her assurances seemed to do him good. He was not himself, however, and had he been on his feet he would have stamped and shaken himself heartily and brought his nerves to their bearings. As it was he sat still and trembled, and looked at Muriel appealingly, and yet pityingly. She became seriously alarmed, and said:

"Geoffrey, you are ill. Look, there's a chemist opening his shop—cannot he give you something?"

It was on the south side of Westminster Bridge, and the brougham was stopped. He ran back and entered the shop. An untidy-looking man, with weak eyes and an unwholesome complexion, came out of a back room, wondering what such a customer could want at such an hour.

"What I want," said Geoffrey, "is brandy. Call it Epsom's salts, and give me a shilling's worth."

The chemist didn't trouble to call it anything, but took the shilling.

"A little chill or a fright, I suppose," said he in an insinuating manner. "Nothing serious, I hope. Yes, yes, we'll soon put you right."

He put something with the brandy, for form's sake, and handed it to his customer in a glass that one might find any day in a superior hotel or club smoking-room, and the contents also for the matter of that. It was, in fact, quite a commonplace medicine. Geoffrey Delfoy felt decidedly better when he had swallowed the draught. He was well set up, and walked back to the brougham with a firm purpose, with no misgivings as to his nerves or anything else whatever. He became talkative as regards their future, and the timidity and weakness which had formerly characterised his manner wholly disappeared. He vowed quite unnecessarily that people should not interfere with him and his purposes in life, and inferentially conveyed the impression that his weakness had been occasioned by some desperate opposition he had encountered to his undertaking the journey on which he was bent.

By this time they had passed through Kennington, and were training in a south-easterly direction towards Camberwell. They were leaving the houses behind them, and occasionally passed an open field with a hedge by the roadside. In some of these fields the builder was at work; in others the fences were dilapidated, and boards announced

that the ground was to be let for building purposes. They had entered upon the confines of an improving neighbourhood, and by-and-by they drew up at the the Green Man, a small wayside public house, designed to satisfy the wants of market gardeners and small local shopkeepers, but now the resort of bricklayers and navvies, who were draining and roadmaking and digging foundations, and piling up great heaps of clay to show it was an improving neighbourhood, and that the Green Man had seen his day. They had shored him up to prevent his falling into the main sewer they were digging out, like a large grave in which they intended to bury him and the fresh air, the hedgerows and elm trees, the larks and the swallows, no longer wanted in an improving neighbourhood.

The brougham was rather out of place there with the brickbats and the mud and the great cart ruts. Delfoy gave his directions, and very soon they floundered out of the quagmire into a region of small villas and terraces, doing their best to look old established and quite at home, but failing in point of tone, with a very narrow curb stone, and a roadway of unrolled metal, and lamp-posts without burners or lanterns. A little way along, looking very lonely in a field, was an iron church, and beyond, in a planned square, was an imposing stone church, but no houses were near. The builders were expected to improve the neighbourhood up to the standard of the church by-and-by, for the roads were all made. They were, however, very stony, as if designed for penance, and very square and formal for the sake of ground rents.

The brougham stopped at the iron church, which didn't seem to be much frequented, as the paths were full of weeds and the windows and doors far from clean. A four-wheel cab was drawn up near the church, with the driver reading a newspaper on the box. He was an elderly and red-faced man, wearing a heavy and much worn double cape that he never laid aside even on the hottest days on account of a tendency to rheumatism and alcoholic catarrh. His exposure and endurance were certified by a woebegone hat, the nap of which had been plastered down by the rain of other days. His horse stood with a dejected air, as indicating a total loss of all interest in life, and the arrival of the smart brougham aroused in the pair only the most languid interest in the important transaction then pending.

On entering they found Mr. Brill at the altar, wearing a

gown and a berretta, looking extremely solemn, and with a prayer book in his hand. A grey-headed old man, with a bunch of keys in one hand and his hat in the other, was the only other person in the place, and a whispered conversation between Brill and Delfoy resulted in summoning the cab-driver within the church. The ceremony was then commenced, and no time was lost by Mr. Brill, whose ordinary peculiarities were exaggerated by a disposition to intone; and whenever he departed from a melancholy monotone, which he much enjoyed, apparently, he made the most extraordinary and inharmonious sounds imaginable, all in the belief that he was a perfect exponent of the artistic in ceremonial.

When he had finished he asked the cabman and the old man with the keys to accompany him to the vestry, which was a small box about eight feet square, furnished with a deal dressing-table, hung round with faded red chintz, and one chair. Here he left them to take care of his berretta, while he went to join those of his more immediate concern. He left them also a bottle of whisky, three tumblers, and a jug of water, brought early from the Green Man by the grey-headed custodier of the bunch of keys.

"Delfoy, my friend," said Brill, bustling up with a piece of blue paper, a penny inkbottle, and a steel pen, "sign your names here. You'll miss your train. I'll look after the witnesses."

Muriel had become very grave. The ill-conditioned attendants, the eccentric and undignified priest, the squalor of the surroundings distressed her. The brougham when it fetched her had been perfect, the meeting at the Horse Guards had been intelligible, the sudden indisposition on the journey had aroused her sympathy and excited her to active participation in the arrangements, but this was not the kind of wedding she had pictured. The trousseau, the dressing-case, the flood of wrappers and travelling garments, the supplementary dress baskets, and the profusion of toilette nicknacks had created a standard from which the little iron church in the improving neighbourhood of Myatt's fields was a sad falling off. She was gloomy and dissatisfied; but Geoffrey signed with eagerness, albeit with a trembling hand, and she signed too.

"Let's get away from this horrid place," she said, and nothing more. How much she felt of undefined dread; and what should cause the fearful sinking in her inmost heart she could no more define than could the coachman who cracked

Largess.

his whip and did his duty, neither knowing nor caring what befel as he drove at a headlong speed to catch the Dover train.

Meanwhile Mr. Brill was discharging the ceremonial hospitalities.

"Now, my friends," said he, seated in the one chair, "there's a sovereign each for you from the bridegroom. A very fine fellow is our friend the bridegroom, very fine and very liberal."

"Quite the right sort," said the cabman in a hoarse whisper. "The sort as suits me."

"And me too," said the old man, with a shake of the keys, which he never laid down. The sovereign was a happy surprise to him, and would prove, he knew, a perfect godsend of a Sunday's dinner to his household, so he poised the tumbler of whisky and water and said: "God bless 'em from me as is a old man and seen his day. God bless 'em."

"Well spoken, friend," said Mr. Brill, with increasing dignity. "I like you for that. Your salutation does you honour. There's a great future before that young man who has just left us. You'll hear of him in high places." Then, sinking his voice to a whisper, he added: "You know, friends, in a case like this there's sometimes cause for a little quiet and secrecy. There are cases in which there's a necessity for avoiding ostentatious displays—you understand."

Mr. Brill's speech ended with a pantomime of winks and nods; and the cabman, looking into his tumbler, with a knowing smile, said with perfect self-complacency:

"*We* know, governor; 'tain't the fust time we've see'd this sort of thing."

And he shook his head and looked into his tumbler, now only half full, with ineffable contempt, and drank off the remaining contents as if desirous of conveying that the discussion of self-evident propositions was a waste of time.

"Beg pardon, sir," said he, as he put the tumbler on the table. "No offence, but ain't there no signin' for us to do? I remember when I took the missis to church there was a considerable lot o' signin'—quite a considerable lot."

The grey-headed old man with the keys shook them and nodded approvingly.

"Well," said Mr. Brill, "now you mention it, there *is* some signing. I'd really quite forgotten it. I have the document here—both documents. Here's the licence from the Vicar General's office in Doctors' Commons, and here's the register,"

he added, producing two papers from his pocket. "I'll fetch the ink, my friends."

The ink was fetched, and the two men signed their names, the cabman first and the old man afterwards. Mr. Brill put the papers back in his pocket-book, blinking and puffing as he did so, as if the importance of the matter caused him unusual excitement.

They then had another tumbler of whisky and water, remarking each in turn that he was sure he didn't know, but he thought he might take just another; and Mr. Brill, having packed in a bag what he called the "props," meaning his gown and berretta and his large black felt hat, emerged from the church in a long grey overcoat and a small hat of commonplace proportions, but much too small for his head, and as far removed from clerical significance as his boots. He directed the cabman to drive him to the Spotted Dog in the Strand, where he called for a glass of gin and ginger beer, and drank it gloomily, standing.

Leaving the Spotted Dog, he hurried through Holywell Street, passed through the gateway of Dane's Inn, and hastened into one of the entries on the right, where he mounted to the topmost suite of chambers. He let himself in with a key, and flung the black bag on a chair, already littered with old newspapers and some much worn clothes.

It was a suite of three rooms: a sitting-room, a bedroom, and a small kitchen, all in a state of dirt and disorder, and from the fact that the frying-pan remained unwashed since the last cooking of sausages, it was to be presumed the laundress had ceased her attentions for some days. Mr. Brill was alone.

He began by lighting a gas stove to boil the kettle, executed a double shuffle on the floor as evidence of glee, said "Damn it" with great emphasis, and began taking off his clothes. The last garment that he removed, if it can be called a garment, consisted of a pad, as much as three inches in thickness in some parts, covering his right shoulder, bladebone, and breast, and extending all down his right side to below his knee, round which it was strapped firmly, so as to make the knee difficult to bend and cause the manner of a stiff leg. Freeing himself from this encumbrance, which would have been quite sufficient to embarrass the most expert double shuffler, he poured a cup of hot water from the kettle, and with its aid loosened the fastening of his glossy wig. This disclosed a snuff-coloured head of hair, close cropped, and much more like

a wig than that he had removed. More hot water removed the dye from his eyebrows and the colour from his cheeks, which had long ceased to appear puffy, and in about ten minutes from the time of his entering the room he developed into a smart young man of moderate stature, rather slim than otherwise, dressed in a suit of plaid tweed, with a blue tie and a horseshoe pin. The clothes were new. They had been worn only twice before, and from the remarks of his companions at the Albion, where he revived his strength with steak and onions at two o'clock that afternoon, it was obvious that his appearance had much changed for the better.

He was addressed as Bill Shout, and paid for his steak with a ten-pound note, which was one of several. The unusual incident was remarked by a group of three friends seated at a table on the other side of the room, and as Shout's circumstances were thoroughly well-known to every one of his companions, inquiry as to the origin of this flow of wealth was natural.

"What's the meaning of that, old man?" asked a slender youth, with shaven eyebrows—a necessity of his professional engagement—a small round nose, that was usually added to on the stage, and a small round mouth, which also possessed the advantage of adapting itself to any form that burnt cork and the art of "making-up" could suggest.

"What's the meaning of what?" asked Shout, with a surly look.

"Don't be nasty, old man," said the young fellow. "We haven't asked you to stand anything yet."

"No," said Shout, "and when you've been in the profession a little longer, you'll learn that impertinent curiosity does not lead to advancement."

"I'm sure, Mr Shout," said an elderly man, with a round face, and great dignity of demeanour, who had hitherto been concealed from Shout by a partition. "Our young friend desired no intentional rudeness. I'm sure we must all be glad to congratulate you on any piece of good fortune. I trust you are fulfilling a profitable engagement."

The speaker was a provincial manager, who aspired to tragedy, and whom Shout felt it prudent to conciliate. He accordingly crossed towards him, offered his hand, and said:

"I accept your congratulations, Mr Fanner. I've just completed a most successful engagement, thank you?"

"In the provinces?"

"No, I've been taking a leading part in some private theatricals—a little domestic comedy contrived by the party that engaged me. It's not as agreeable as the legitimate business, but it pays well—remarkably well."

Shout made this remark with great dignity, looking completely over the head of the young man devoid of eyebrows, who had excited his animosity; and when he had finished, he wished Mr Fanner "good morning," and left the place.

. . . . . .

Out in the English Channel, a league or so from the Dover Pier, Muriel, in the highest of spirits, and with every bud of promise bursting into fragrant bloom, so exhilarating had been the journey down, was being conducted by the gangway of the steamer to the fore deck, where the luggage lay heaped in a great mound, uncovered and quite exposed, for the sun shone and the sea was as glass. They were on the way to find a small portmanteau, and, if possible, excavate it.

"There's one of ours,' she exclaimed; "but no, there's the name of 'Lucas' on it—yet it's very like."

"Ah," said Delfoy, startled, "I forgot to tell you. That's the name we must travel by." A look of pain broke over Muriel's face. "It's necessary," he said. "We must keep this matter secret for a time or I am lost. *You* will not mind?"

He looked at her searchingly as he made the assertion interrogatory: "*You* will not mind?"

She did not answer. She could not. Again a tumult hurried through her heart and brain, which no words could express, no thoughts of hers define—a harassing doubt, shapeless and unstable, but imperiously dominant. And yet of what avail at that moment? The very question was a condemnation of the act for which acquittal was sought—a denunciation of the entire method and process of the week's work. The measure of his selfishness and his estimate of her devotion were expressed in the ungenerous question. What could she do or say at such a time and in such a place? She answered nothing, because the only answer possible was a repetition of her cry on the summer evening in the park of Charnock, when first he bent her gentleness to his will.

"Oh, Geoffrey, deal mercifully with me. I cannot help but love you."

END OF THE FIRST PERIOD.

The Head of the Family.

SECOND PERIOD: THE LATTER PART OF THE SIXTIES.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DELFOYS.

THE Delfoys "came over with the Conqueror." Their name implies the impressive fact, and the Doomsday Book records it. An historical account of the progress of the family through eight centuries to the sixties of the nineteenth would be as tedious as it is unneccessary for the purposes of this narrative, and those who are curious on the subject are referred to the British Museum, and particularly to the history of the Plantagenets.

The record will exhibit a remarkable instance in this undoubtedly aristocratic family of the disposition in man to appropriate what he has no right to, when he can do so with impunity, or in other words, to exact what weakness cannot withhold; and to hold, use, misuse, and dissipate without hindrance from anyone what things soever may have been acquired in whatever way—a characteristic that is variously described as bull-dog tenacity and horse-leech persistency, or in its weaker forms as the characteristic of the limpet, the barnacle, or the parasitical ivy. Thus the policy of the Delfoy family may be described as that of acquisitiveness tempered by dissipation—a policy that has been consecrated by such distinguished persons as the Roman Emperors and many others even before King William, and sedulously encouraged since among the governing classes of all races and peoples. It has been copied in our time by leaders of the masses, who in the interests of the toiling millions have acquired, or as some describe it, "annexed" with great industry, and have fallen short in the matter of dissipation only through lack of time and opportunity; but as the reforming tendencies of the age

increase, no doubt the acquisitions of wealth will become more easy even to these, and from the same causes the opportunity for dissipation more abundant. For, setting aside those few restless beings with whom labour is a necessity of existence, the more leisure you have the more money you spend if you have it; and if you haven't the money, the leisure is a cause of distress. Wealth, in fact, creates leisure, and leisure dissipation. Thus, happily for mankind, the plutocrat of to-day is ever on the way, from the very plethora of his possessions, to become the mendicant of to-morrow.

Following the practice common among the aristocracy throughout the whole of those eight centuries, the Delfoys had frequently found it advisable, and sometimes necessary, to replenish their revenues, and some would say invigorate their blood—blue as it was—by going into the City.

The practice of "going into the City" is common to the whole of the inhabitants of these realms who have the chance. It is the place where people are most frequently disappointed, yet they go, day by day, with renewed hope from various causes, and with various intentions. But although the fact of "going into the City" assumes a variety of forms arising out of the status and purpose of the individual, the principle is the same with all. Men go into the City with the expectation, or at least the desire, of taking something out of it. Some go with the modest idea of working, some occasional attendants make spasmodic raids, and treat the occult evolutions of the financial world as familiarly as they would a roulette table, and with the same sort of result. The Delfoys took neither of these courses, they went in as casual dealers, but wholesale and with a speciality. They bartered the Conqueror for a good dowry, cash down, and they have done it often, as half the peerage has done it, and will go on doing it, if they don't want to become paupers and effete. It is the law.

The motive of the Delfoys and their kind was, and always will be, the necessity for replenishment: the motive on the other side was, and always will be, the discovery of a new ambition following the achievement of all the commoner social desires. The ingenuity of the spirit of envy is one of the most curious of the many extravagancies of human ambition. When it has exhausted the resources of money, when its victim is possessed of everything that money can command, it frets for those things which no amount of money can buy, and chief among these is lineage. The Delfoys occasionally gratified

those extraordinary cravings by giving the next best thing to an ancient name: alliance with those who can boast of one. They accordingly went into the City in olden times and offered the best brand in the country—the Norman Conqueror himself.

Latterly, however, they had not made such an excursion, not because necessity in the matter of finance was not clamorous, but pride was strong, and the present head of the family, George Adolphus Leuchars Delfoy, had preferred mortgages and blood to a free hand and commerce. His father had desired him to follow the precedent set by his ancestors and go into the City with the Conqueror, and knock him down to the highest bidder. He, however, married the Lady Grace Vendale in the year 1843, to the great joy of his mother and the confusion of his father, who never ceased to declare that Lady Grace was a temptation that should have been resisted. Strange to say this same George Adolphus Leuchars, in the year of grace 1868, having seen the error of his ways, wanted his son, the George Adolphus Leuchars next in succession, to go into the City. Happily there was no Lady Grace hovering in the neighbourhood of the domestic arena to intrude the overpowering temptation of blue blood in his son's way as there had been in his own case, and the expedition was seriously contemplated.

Lady Grace herself was not consulted in this matter. There were cogent reasons for leaving her out of the calculation, and it is not worth while recounting the first forty of them, because the forty-first settled the question for all time. Lady Grace hated the City and everything connected with it, save only the occasional banquet and ball graced by Royalty or the first Minister of the Crown. Consequently, it was tacitly understood that nothing was to be said to Lady Grace on the subject of George Adolphus Leuchars her son's intention of going into the City, and that the outburst which would ensue on the accomplished fact must be added to the account of east winds, fogs, and other unpreventable evils.

This family conspiracy would have been in all respects very deplorable and much to be condemned if Lady Grace had been otherwise agreeable, but she was not. She was colourless, mentally and physically. With the exception of her arched eyebrows, and her luxuriant light brown hair, she possessed no features that exacted a second thought, or provoked either disparagement or approval. It had been her misfortune to be educated, from her earliest infancy, in the belief that her station required her "to sit still and look nice."

She carried out the first part of the programme to perfection by steadily refraining from doing anything whatever that any other person could be found to do for her; but in the second she was a failure. This, however, was, so far as she was compelled to admit the fact, in her opinion, the fault of those whose duty it was to attend on her. She paid the highest wages and secured the best possible assistance, and could do no more. If those whom she employed to make her "look nice" did not succeed, obviously they were to blame, and no one else. The successive maids, French and otherwise, but mostly French, who had undertaken the task, would have defended themselves on the ground of the thin, straight lips, the straight, pinched nose, and the angular chin, the curveless back, and the austere manner. Indolence and consequent indigestion did the rest. The whole series of misfortunes acted and reacted one upon the other, and a querulous concern for her dignity and social reputation reduced her life to one continuous but purposeless strife. "The poor madame, she is much unhappy," said Fidèle.

The head of the house was a match for Lady Grace in the matter of pride of race. He had, indeed, a very poor opinion of his wife's family, since it could be traced back only as far as the seventeenth century. In the matter of nobility it was an affair of the Bute Ministry, and therefore quite a Brummagem business. His motive for the alliance was not dictated by the charms of Lady Grace, but by a secret ambition which he had encouraged from his youth. He had conceived the notion that relations with an ennobled family might, in conjunction with the political influence of the Delfoys, cause the fountain of honour to flow in his direction. It never did, and here he was, at the age of five-and-fifty, a commoner and impecunious.

He was a remarkable looking man. A high forehead and slightly aquiline nose, with pointed, tremulous lips, and eyes that were piercing without indicating firmness. He wore a small moustache and an imperial, which had become fashionable in his younger days, and had been retained by him from force of habit. He was not a man whom one would have chosen as a boon companion on the first introduction, and close acquaintance induced reserve rather than friendship. He and his wife exchanged courtesies, but no confidences.

The family and the family name was his single passion, and it swayed him to his destruction. He had never discriminated as to the distinction between what the family, in his opinion,

ought to have and what it could afford. The family had what it wanted, and mortgages accumulated.

The stringency became acute towards the close of the London season of sixty-eight, and the head of the family conferred in private with his successor on the subject of life interests, settlements, jointures, and timber.

The "successor" was inclined in personal appearance to be dark, much to the satisfaction of his father, as there had not been a dark Delfoy for three generations, and the Delfoys, in his opinion, should all be dark. The only defect he had ever observed in his own immaculate person was that it was not dark enough for one of Norman descent. The model Delfoy, so far as accurate presumption from portraiture could give a standard, was a certain distinguished member of the court of His Majesty King James the Second, whose portrait pervaded the Castle in every variety of form and character, but each and all representing the Delfoy nose, around which the rest of the body and its appendages were grouped. Not to have the Delfoy nose was not to be a Delfoy.

The "successor" was taller than his father and rather gaunt, a hard drinker and a hard swearer. He had maintained the reputation of the family in all essential points, especially in the matter of satisfying his wants regardless of the consequences; and he looked upon a discussion of the kind his station as heir of the Delfoys now imposed upon him as a bore. It jarred upon his nerves, and he classed his father's constant references to the subject of economy with the importunities of his duns.

They were down in the country, at Luckross Castle in Hampshire, arranging the autumnal migration during the three weeks' stay at the ancestral home. The father had been down for some days. The sons had that morning arrived from town, and the son of the house, fresh from Piccadilly, but with visions of heather before him, was in conference with his father. Parliament was about to be dissolved, and in addition to the question of rents, interest, foreclosure of mortgages, and the necessity for new loans, the family seat in the House of Commons had to be considered in circumstances of an unusually distressing character: it was no longer a certainty.

The situation was peculiarly embarrassing. My Lady was thinking of going to Biarritz, or the Tyrol, or "some other damned place," as George Adolphus, the successor, termed it.

"As if she couldn't stay at the Castle like a sensible woman," said George Adolphus in possession.

"Everything should give way to duty," remarked the head of the family, impressively, and he rose up from his chair to say it in the presence of George Adolphus, the successor. "By 'duty' I mean duty to the family, and at the present moment the chief duty—the exclusive, absorbing, paramount duty to the family is the coming election: money must be found for it, no matter what else goes to the wall, because there are associated with this election important interests at stake, interests especially concerning the family."

He repeated the last observation in a low tone, as if it were a matter only thought of by himself, and must be kept very quiet and confidential.

"Well, sir," said his successor, "I'm off for the twelfth to-morrow, and shall be very glad to meet your views."

"Oh, yes, George, yes," he mused, and then added, almost apologetically: "The moor's very expensive."

"No doubt, but we've always had a moor."

"Yes, we've always had a moor."

"It's the balls that have hipped you, sir, and they're no good—only swagger."

"Your mother thinks differently, George. She has them for your sister. What can I do? Can't you persuade your mother to be reasonable?"

"No, by God; Geoffrey can, or he could a year ago."

"What's that Geoffrey can do?" inquired the younger son, entering the room with a cigar in his mouth. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, in what was known as the business room, and Geoffrey, being anxious to replenish his exchequer before the autumnal flight, had come down to the Castle for a week to make himself agreeable.

The head of the family looked grave, frigid, almost scowling, and Geoffrey, observing his demeanour, took a seat and asked what was the matter.

"The matter," said the father, "is serious. It is the perennial difficulty of money, aggravated by special circumstances of which you, I regret to say, provide us with the most embarrassing."

"Oh," said Geoffrey, "that's annoying, because I want some money myself. Must have it, in fact."

He was provokingly cool, and apparently not in the least

The Younger Son

concerned either about the family embarrassments or his own, except so far as his words conveyed.

"I don't know whether you are aware of it, young sir," continued the father, "but your recent proceedings have been highly embarrassing to me in the House. You are being spoken of."

"There's no harm in that, I hope. For my part, I am glad of it."

"Your name is associated with the notorious Bowdler, sir," exclaimed the father with horror.

"And why not?"

"A trafficker in treason, and you ask 'why not'? Think of the family name, its history and associations!"

"Oh," said Geoffrey, rising and flinging the end of his cigar in the fire, "that's your affair. You and George may look after that. You monopolise the family name, and all that belongs to it."

He lit another cigar, appropriated the only easy-chair in the room, and regarded his father inquiringly as he leant his elbow on the back of it. George stood at the side of the fireplace, with his hands behind him, grim and sardonic of countenance. He was interested and somewhat amused, and it was his place obviously to look on in this game. His father stood behind his writing-table, on the other side of the fireplace, and Geoffrey sat at the apex of the triangle. He laughed as he said:

"This is quite a new light to you of our relative interests, sir, but it is the true one."

His father looked at him and then looked down. His lips moved nervously; his hands clasped and unclasped. His embarrassment made him speechless for a time. At length he said reproachfully, and from his heart:

"Geoffrey, you astound me. I have heard you spoken of as I said, but I was not prepared for this. I heard you were associating with revolutionists, but I didn't think you *were* one. I didn't think you would speak derisively of the family, and in fact defile your own nest."

He spoke with genuine emotion, but the son was in no way impressed. Indeed, he laughed a cold, contemptuous laugh as he said:

"It's not my nest, sir. You two are in the nest. I'm tipped over the side, to fly or fall as the wind may chance." The remark was shocking enough, but it only made his

hearers speechless. He continued: "The fact is, sir, you seem to be living in the clouds, and don't know what's going on. You sit, day by day, in the House of Commons and seem to know nothing of the political forces at work around you. Pray have you ever heard of the Hyde Park Railings?"

"Bless my soul, Geoffrey, what have the Hyde Park Railings to do with us here in Luckross Castle?"

"Everything, sir; they enunciate a principle. Certain workpeople feel they haven't the political privileges they ought to have, so they knock down the Hyde Park Railings. Then you give them household suffrage. I consider I haven't my proper share of the Delfoy revenues, so I join the Hyde Park Railings people. It's very simple. I come down here for a little ready money and you begin talking about the family name and economy. I don't feel interested in the family name and economy, while the family name gives me nothing, and I have consequently nothing to economise with."

"But aren't you in the Buffs?" asked the head of the family.

"Certainly, for the honour of the family—not for my profit."

"Haven't I just arranged a Lieutenant-Colonelcy for you?"

"No doubt also for the honour of the family, and in a measure for my profit out of the Army Estimates. That's quite right. None of us object to bring money into the family from the supplies voted for the Army. But that is not the question."

The head of the family sighed. All this was quite new, and altogether reprehensible. Even George Adolphus the younger began to think matters had gone far enough, and he was getting anxious, but he said nothing. The embryo Colonel in the Buffs proceeded, walking about the room, and discoursing lightly, with a freedom and facility that astonished his austere father almost as much as the sentiments he uttered. Said he:

"This is a Reforming Age, and you may take it from me that the younger sons are going to strike. They won't do it in the clumsy way of the Trades Unionists. They won't combine, but they will act each in his own way, and each for his own purpose. In this way they will achieve their object, at least those who deserve to do so will, and it's a very simple one."

He paused a moment or two, practising the tricks of oratory with consummate impudence, and proving his capacity in the rhetoric of reform.

"Let me explain," he continued. "You draw thirty thousand a year."

"No, no!" exclaimed the head of the family, "nothing like it!"

"Then you ought to, if you managed properly. Well, then, there's you and the mother, and George and Grace and myself. That's five. Fives into thirty is six thousand a year. Give me six thousand a year, and my room in the Castle as usual, and I shall consider the family name a part of my property worth thinking about. If not, then I have no interest in the family name, and join the Park Railings Squad."

He waved his hand in an airy way, took a seat at the end of the room, crossed his legs, and began tapping the table in a meditative manner. The others exchanged glances, and then concentrated their amazed gaze on the terrible anomaly before them. He sat with perfect nonchalance—cold, impassive, calculating, without the slightest vestige of the violence shown in the park at Charnock three years before. He resumed:

"I construe recent movements in a practical manner. It will pay me to use the lower orders for my own purposes. I sha'n't go about smashing park railings; but if I'm to have no interest in the family of a substantial character, it would be absurd for me to sustain it. Look at the case for yourselves," he continued. "What chance would the family have, or any other family, if the younger sons were to come out? Imagine the effect of a demonstration at the coming election: the Younger sons and the Proletariat. Just think it over. I'm going a ride with Grace: she understands the situation."

"He'll do as he says,'" exclaimed the father as he disappeared.

"Not he," said the brother. "He's only bluffing. Give him time. He won't throw away his allowance."

George Adolphus, the successor, wanted nothing disturbed. The least possible amount of depletion of the estate was what would best satisfy him, consistently with compliance with his own requirements. A moor and a good hunting stable were his chief gratifications, and he cared nothing for politics or social aspirations. His father's position was more complicated. Besides the embarrassment of the competition between the various members of his family and his own needs, he had the animal instinct of parentage to disturb his resolution. He liked Geoffrey for his obstinacy: it was a well-established Delfoy characteristic.

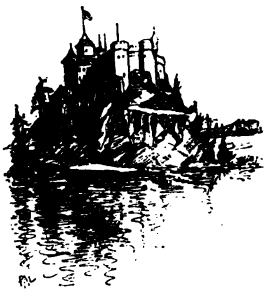
"I'm afraid you're wrong, George," said he. "I'm afraid he'll do as he says. He's a relentless, self-willed boy: always has been. Do you remember how he cut the cat in strips, merely because he said he would do so, if I didn't take him to town with me. I'm afraid of him, George." The speaker mused a while and then continued: "Just imagine him bringing a crowd of those blatant ruffians down here at the election. We must prevent that in any case."

"It's all damned rubbish, I tell you," said George Adolphus, the successor, and left the head of the family alone, shaking its head, and finding nothing else in it than that Geoffrey was an obstinate, callous, and reckless sort of fellow, whom nothing would turn from his purpose, and to whom the suffering of others was a trifle.

The Notorious Bowellers

CHAPTER VIII.

LUCKROSS CASTLE AND A BULL-PUP.



LUCKROSS CASTLE was a building of unquestionable antiquity. The architecture of the portcullis and its surroundings indicated that it dated from the crossbow period, and its site was chosen obviously from motives of defence. Imagine a high rock in the midst of a broad expanse of water, and reared upon this rock a castle of three stories in height, the rock and castle both being in the form of a Latin cross. The portcullis and drawbridge, which in olden times had barred the entrance, were at the foot of the cross, and from these visitors proceeded up the long arm to the main entrance. The common hall or vestibule opened into the grand hall, which occupied the whole of the centre of the building at that part in which the arms of the cross intersected, and light was given to it by four magnificent oriel windows of stained glass of mediæval origin, representing the four seasons. The ceiling was panelled in squares and octagons, and emblazoned with the arms of all the families with whom the Delfoys had been allied. By grace and favour of Garter King at Arms, those who had no arms before this august alliance had had them made for them, and there they were gloriously associated with the most dazzling epochs of our history—and with the Delfoys.

Spreading out from this hall, the four arms of the cross formed corridors leading right and left to smaller rooms, such as the ordinary dining-room, the morning-room, and library, each with its outlook across an undulating and richly wooded country, and each bearing within itself evidence of the cultivation of a sound artistic taste, that by rare good fortune had been spared the reforming hand of the parvenu, and gave one a glimpse of a baronial residence untouched for at least two

hundred years, with its ornaments, pictures, and arms, the heirlooms of its family and of itself.

The building, its surroundings, and contents explained the cause of the absorbing pride of the head of the family, though it may be doubted whether the passion were not an hereditary instinct rather than a reasonable growth based upon a cultivated appreciation. The desire to maintain a family name in honourable repute lives too often long after the capacity even to estimate the grandeur of its associations has ceased to exist; and the world is sometimes shocked by the spectacle of a clown besmirching a glorious legend with the chronicles of the blackleg and the prize ring. The Delfoys had not fallen as low as this, but the pride of race had already ceased to be a spur to effort, and was gradually falling to the lower level of senseless egotism, as if the inheritance of a brilliant retrospect should alone confer a title to respect and admiration. The gratification of an engrossing selfishness manured the vicious growth of arrogance, and there was nothing left in heart or mind of any of them but the cankerous germ of a moral death.

But there was energy enough of a certain sort in the youth of the family. With Grace Delfoy it took the form of proficiency in dealing with dogs and horses. She was an expert in bloodhounds, and was almost fit for the circus in the matter of horses. She was small like her mother, but a better figure, hard and wiry, a thin-lipped, hard-featured girl, with a cold grey eye and a nerve of iron—a great walker, a great rider, and a perfect sailor. She adored Geoffrey, and envied him only because he was a man. Geoffrey accepted the admiration with equanimity, and gave Grace the pleasure of his companionship when he also was in the humour to be amused. She was just twenty at this time, and therefore, as far as age was concerned, marriageable. Her activity was a terrible trial to her mother, for what could my Lady Grace do for a daughter whose accomplishments centred in the stable and the kennel, and where among my Lady Grace's connection could she find a husband for a girl with a hard skin and a harsh voice, and who preferred a hunting crop to a parasol any day? My Lady Grace didn't try.

Nor did Geoffrey; it was not a matter of concern to him; but he would ride with his sister to fill up the time he spent in the dull old place. So they rode, and a mad gallop it was every now and then when they came to a common or some

fallow fields with the additional diversion of a few gates in the way, for Grace had a route of her own apart from the Queen's highway, and knew where she could go without upsetting the equanimity of the farmers.

Coming back on the highroad at a walk, Grace opened upon a subject that had much exercised her.

"Do you know Mr. Heritage who is coming here to-day?" she asked.

"A little; he's a friend of George's—not my friend," said Geoffrey.

"Is he rich?"

"What do you call rich?"

"Can he do things *well?*" she asked. "Can he keep a dozen hunters, a yacht of a thousand tons, and a proper town house?"

Geoffrey laughed.

"That's a rather tall standard, Grace," he said.

"It's my idea of the correct thing, anyway. Can he do that?"

"I think not just now; but he is said to be his uncle's heir—Lord Freshfield, the banker, who is enormously rich—and can do all you say a dozen times over."

"Freshfield," mused Grace. "How is he a peer and a banker?"

"He's a peer because he was a banker and a successful one."

"How odd!" exclaimed Grace. "Isn't it odd, Geoffrey?"

"To you perhaps, but the old order of things has changed. The peerage is now the reward of successful tradespeople, contractors, financiers, salesmen, and, I suppose, commission agents. The peerage being a new creation, Heritage will not succeed to it. It dies with the present man; but Heritage gets the money they say, and it is over a million."

"Oh," said Grace, "and what sort of a man is he?"

"Handsome, but not your sort. He does not hunt, and has no enthusiasm for any sport. He reads a great deal, and is a quiet sort of a chap. Some people say he's a bit of a prig, but he never bores you, and never interferes with other fellows' sport. Has the mother been saying anything to you about him?"

"No, but I think there's something in the wind. I don't see why, as Heritage is going north with George, there is any necessity for his coming south to see *him*. They would in the ordinary way have quite enough of each other at the Cleuch, I should say; and, from what you tell me of him,

I fancy he is not exactly the man George would take to of his own accord."

They turned into the main road as she said this, and descried the Castle wagonette approaching, with Heritage on the box beside the driver. Geoffrey communicated the fact. An introduction followed, and the guest had a mounted escort to the Castle.

The construction put by Grace on this visit was fairly accurate. A vague hope had dictated the invitation; and the pleasure of visiting an historic mansion had dictated the acceptance, nothing more. No other guest was present at the Castle to check the feeblest inclination for more intimate relations should it chance to be awakened in the breast of Morris Heritage, and the object of parental solicitude was left to go her own sweet way in the unconscious achievement of the family ambition.

Morris Heritage had a fine head—a countenance suggestive of repose, and yet indicating a mind capable of maintaining a stern purpose. He was in general appearance rather commonplace than otherwise, a sort of average man in fact, making no pretensions to excellence in anything, enjoying life in a quiet way, as few men having an abundant income have the strength to do: he was neither stolidly indifferent to the greater things of life nor extravagantly interested in the petty. He was indeed at the age of thirty-five still finding his feet in matters of judgment and opinion, and nervously doubtful of the justness of the conclusions he was inclined to.

He was always neatly dressed, on the principle laid down by Lord Chesterfield: within the fashion, but avoiding its extremes. He had a large dark brown eye, wore his hair rather short, and was clean shaven. There is reason for supposing that he endured the discomforts of the razor because he was conscious of the possession of a pair of lips that were always pleasant to look upon, and that he would lose in appearance by covering them. Such consideration does sometimes weigh even with the male human, and it would perhaps be better if more people considered these points and made the best of their appearance. Morris Heritage was essentially a neat and careful man, and avoided extravagance of all sorts.

Geoffrey avoided him and all the family before dinner. He desired the first volley of his attack to settle home and create its legitimate moral effect before renewing hostilities. He proposed to himself only a light guerilla warfare, until he

could see a good position a day or two hence for another and more effective fusillade. He accordingly proposed to himself the enjoyment of a luxurious idleness during the afternoon, and he went off with a pipe in his mouth, a new cherry-tree stick in his hand, and a bull-pup at his heels, to think things over, and by-and-by he sat himself down on a felled tree to refill his pipe.

While so engaged he bethought him of a letter from Muriel that he had in his pocket unopened. It had been reposted by the hall-porter of his club, and he had put it aside for a leisure moment. He opened it and read a line or two, yawned, and put it back in his pocket. He hated long letters, he said, and lighted his pipe.

"MY DEAREST HUSBAND," wrote Muriel,—"The children are so very good this evening that I shall be able to write to you quite a long letter and tell you all the news. First and foremost, our dear Philip actually walked two steps this afternoon, and though he went plump down immediately afterwards, the feat of walking has been accomplished. He is now, as I write, building a tower with the bricks you gave him, but he doesn't do it very well, and I have to leave off every now and then to help him. Do you know, I think he will be a musician, for there is a barrel organ outside and he is trying to sing to it quite loud. Of course he doesn't sing in tune, nor more is the organ quite in tune either, but it evidently excites his dear little mind, and I do hope that my conjecture is correct. Theodora, whose first birthday is to-morrow—and I shall give her a kiss for you immediately I awake in the morning—is sleeping quite soundly in her crib, and doesn't mind the noise in the least. Isn't it nice to have them so very good?

"I have not been very well to-day, and was inclined to be nervous to-night, but the idea of writing to you has done me good. As I write I feel as if you were nearer to me, and the thought is comforting. You have been away three weeks now, and I am wondering whether you are at Aldershot to-night or at your London quarters. I am counting the days as usual, and think of the lovely time in store for us at the close of the month. You must not think of me as being lonely" (he never did), "and to-morrow I shall have the little French girl Julie here to help me with the children, and so shall have more rest. Mrs. Littercan, the landlady, has been very kind, and I think she is glad we have taken the whole of her rooms. Her hus-

band has something to do with a railway, and he goes away for days together, 'down the line' she calls it, and when that's the case I sometimes ask her to sit with me, and she brings her mending. I wish she was a little cleaner, but I suppose it's London smoke" (the house was in Torrington Square), "and the blacks will come down. Baby had three smuts on her pretty little nose this afternoon. Jemmy Littercan wheeled the perambulator, and we went round Russell Square four times—quite a long walk—but the doctor says I must keep up my walking as much as possible without getting too tired.

"I must now put Philip to bed, so good-bye, my dearest husband, from your loving, loving wife, MURIEL."

The bull-pup became demonstrative during the pipe filling and made for the cherry-tree stick. Feeling that the time had not yet arrived to permit the decoration of the stick with the marks of teeth, Geoffrey warned him off, and the dog, being perfectly indifferent what he bit so long as he was played with, took quite agreeably to Geoffrey's fingers. This provoked an exclamation. "You little devil!" said Geoffrey, and looked about for something less sacred than a cherry-tree stick for the dog to worry. There was nothing near at hand, no switch to be cut nearer than twenty yards, and no decayed boughs near the moss-grown trunk on which he sat. Muriel's letter was the very thing for such a case. Folded again in its envelope it was just stout enough for a bull-pup's teeth, and being of a superior ivory paper, required a skilful grip on the part of the bull-pup to catch it fast; but the bull-pup was equal to the task, and at the end of the first bout retained a piece of the envelope in his mouth, impaled on one of his teeth, to his great astonishment and inconvenience.

While he was engaged in getting rid of it Geoffrey reflected that the letter might possibly contain something he should know, and it would be better if he looked it over before the bull-pup was again entertained with it. He opened it up, and glanced down the eight pages with a rapidity which showed great consideration on his part for the anxiety of the bull-pup to begin again. There was nothing in the letter, he thought, beyond the usual small talk, so he folded it up with a grin of anticipation, an exact counterpart of the pup's knowing

look of expectation, with his comical little head cocked on one side.

In five minutes the letter was in fragments, scattered to the winds, with the passion and the vows of three years before mere flecks upon the broad expanse of memory, every moment growing more dim and blurred; but such as they were a provocation to resentment, a regret without repentance, a cause of vexation without remorse, a tiresome, irritating reflection of the past that intruded with ghostly persistency, and though intangible as the air, it harried and rebuked, but did not soften.

Conscience is a poor goad when the heart is bad.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DELFOYS DINE.

THE poor little woman known as Mrs. Geoffrey Lucas, who went round Russell Square four times from a sense of duty, was introducing the new French nurse, Julie, to her little pets at the time when the Delfoy family assembled in the west drawing-room for dinner. It was a grand room. Poverty had restrained the reforming hand of plutocratic vandalism within its bounds, and had preserved it a perfectly consistent piece of old English art, without a scrap of Berlin wool or Oriental excrescence to mar the unity contrived by its designers.

My Lady Grace exercised her solitary enthusiasm in the reception of her favourite Geoffrey. She had not seen him before that day, and he must sit next her, take her into dinner, amuse her, and be monopolised by her. Accident and inclination accorded with design in this matter. George could sit next his father, and Grace could be opposite to him, so that Heritage, sitting between her and her mother, would be completely imprisoned—cut off from his refuge, and compelled to the gracious constraint of dinner-table small talk, unless perchance the gods should favour the design of my Lady Grace and he should become particular.

The keenest eye could not say that he was. His perfect manner disarmed criticism and made conjecture futile. The table was small enough to permit of a general conversation, and Geoffrey took care to make it political.

"This is going to be a dreadfully political autumn," said Grace. "We shall hear of nothing else till Christmas but elections."

"Naturally," remarked Geoffrey, "it's the subject. What place do you stand for, Heritage?"

"I?" said Heritage. "I stand for no place."

"Really! That's singular. Everybody's going to stand this time for everywhere. It's the electoral millennium—for candidates."

"And you?" asked Heritage.

"I, sir, have a constituency at my disposal till the 15th of next month; and there's another wretched man trembling in the hope that I will say 'No.' The poor wretch is eager. I'm not."

"Why, Geoffrey," said my Lady Grace, "that is interesting. Why have you kept that to yourself?"

"My dear mother," said Geoffrey, bending low, "I'm learning the great art of reticence, for reticence is the first principle of politics."

"How do you make that out?" inquired his sister in her blunt way.

"No man can be a Minister of the Crown, Grace, if he cannot answer a question without giving any information."

"But are you really thinking of standing?" asked the head of the family, who had been listening with growing concern to this lively passage.

"Yes, sir. I'm perhaps neglecting the observance of the first principle of politics by declaring as much; but we are here in the family circle."

"You support the Government, of course," said the head of the family with trepidation.

"Well," replied Geoffrey, with provoking nonchalance, "that's the question. That doubtful point is the cause of my having till the 15th of September to give my answer."

The Lady Grace suffered a revulsion of feeling, but she didn't speak. Political opinion was to her a religion, and all this was not only new to her, but supremely shocking. That Geoffrey could have any doubt about the line he would take was worse than a declaration of atheism. An agnostic might be received in society of the innermost circle, but a political heretic was to my Lady Grace worse than a lost soul. She trembled and listened.

"'You don't feel disposed to take a leap in the dark,'" said Heritage, after a pause, and using a cant phrase of the day, invented by the Prime Minister. Heritage felt it incumbent on him as a visitor to assist the domestic circle out of a difficulty, and as happens in the case of those well-meaning but unfortunate persons, he put his foot in it up to the ankle. There was another pause. Presently Geoffrey pulled himself together, raised his eyebrows, and said impressively:

"The leap has been taken, Heritage; the question now is where to land. I have made up my mind to land in a given

place, and I shall do it as sure as you are sitting there, presuming I conclude before the 15th to say 'Yes' to the proposal made to me."

The dead silence that followed this declaration indicated to Heritage that it was not a matter of badinage but a serious difference of opinion he was discussing. The terrible anxiety of his host, the sullen demeanour of his friend George, and the fretful activity of the ladies with their bread and their knives and forks, showed him his error, and nerved him to the rescue.

"You politicians," he said, "take matters too seriously."

"That cannot be," exclaimed the head of the family. "It is an obviously and essentially serious matter."

"No doubt, but you are too serious in regard to the details of the immediate present. Your area of vision is too circumscribed. Suppose the country has made an error in this matter. What then?"

"Ah! 'what then,' indeed, what then?" exclaimed the head of the family, while Geoffrey toyed with his glass and smiled approvingly.

"Simply this," rejoined Heritage. "The individual may suffer, but the community will recover, and even revoke. This change has been too sudden and too large, but a decade will see the country equal to cope with it."

"Never," broke in his host, with emphasis altogether disproportionate to the proposition submitted, and Geoffrey continued to toy with his glass and blandly smile.

"It is difficult," said Heritage, looking straight before him, and measuring his words, oblivious of the frowns of his friend George and the anxiety of the Lady Grace. "It is very difficult to construe the movement of any social force, and estimate its strength. It is obvious, for we see it every day, that a man may arise, who, without education, without even common knowledge, and certainly without the judicial faculty, will by mere force of rhetoric, the very principles of which he is incapable of divining, achieve an ascendency over the multitude, and with perfect conscientiousness lead a movement every stage of which is fraught with wrong to the individual, and present evil to the community. But, if I have read contemporary history aright, I find that it takes only a few years for the community to readjust matters. The evil is remedied."

"And what about the individual?" asked the head of the family, who evolved a violent animosity to his guest.

"He unfortunately must suffer," remarked Heritage, with a bow.

"Unless he dodges," put in Geoffrey, laughing. "Heritage," he added, "you're a born politician, because you're a philosopher. You must stand for somewhere. The country cannot do without you."

"No," said Heritage, "a man cannot be everything, and a man's judgment may be determined by what he refrains from attempting, just as a man's excellences may sometimes be presumed from what he is not."

"But we of the advanced party," remarked Geoffrey, with Parliamentary gravity, "do not permit of a negative condition. We are for action and decision."

"I regret I cannot oblige you," said Heritage, "I'm afraid I'm not what you call 'advanced.' I'm essentially a laggard, because I am never satisfied about anything, and least of all about my own judgment and my own work. I have, however, come to one conclusion. A man cannot be and do everything and go everywhere, and I have resolved, among other things, that I will not become a professional politician. I shall, as a consequence, have the satisfaction of a pleasure that is denied the Parliamentary candidate. I shall avoid the ungracious jealousy and envy that is bred of defeat, and, standing aloof, shall experience a generous delight at the success of another."

"You mean," said Geoffrey, with the suggestion of a sneer, "that you are not good at taking a beating."

"No," said Heritage, "that is not my meaning. I should take whatever was in store for me, fighting. But inasmuch as life is too short to achieve perfection, even in any one accomplishment, a man may be excused if he restrict the number of his enterprises; and inasmuch as politics, rightly appreciated and honourably pursued, is the most arduous of all, I except it in the hope that by narrowing my ambitions I may approach success in some."

My Lady Grace had not resumed her equanimity, and thought it prudent to withdraw. As Heritage opened the door for her, she conjured up a smile from some remote corner of her manufactory of those social appendages, and said:

"You must not let them keep you very long from the drawing-room, Mr Heritage."

My Lady Grace thought the atmosphere betokened a storm, and did not approve the turn things had taken.

"I'm surprised you don't intend to stand, Heritage," said

Geoffrey, with provoking insistence, as the guest returned to the table.

"You need not be. A political career has great attractions for me in theory, but the practices of politicians appal and repel me."

"I'm afraid you are not patriotic," said Geoffrey.

"Political ambition, in my observation, is seldom associated with patriotism," said Heritage, who was tempted to go further, but remembered he was in the house of a Member and refrained. To his astonishment, however, the head of the family exclaimed, with unusual vehemence:

"You're quite right, Mr Heritage; patriotism is the last thing thought of nowadays. Self-seeking in every variety of form, including even the tricks of common trading and company mongering, are the motives which lead people to seek a seat in Parliament in these times. The country's going to the deuce, sir, as fast as it can. You have heard the sentiments expressed at this table—at my table" he reiterated, with a vigorous blow that made the glasses ring; and with a look of terrible indignation at Geoffrey, he added: "Ask your friend here, Mr. Heritage, what motives will determine his choice of a political party?"

"I'll answer that question with pleasure," said Geoffrey composedly. "My motives will impel me to make no choice of a party, but I shall revive in my own person the constitutional right of perfect independence."

George Delfoy, who by this time had drunk quite as much wine as he could carry, looked up at the word "independence," and surveyed his brother with a comical look of admiration. Then he burst into a boisterous fit of laughter, and finding no one joined in his hilarity, stopped suddenly, and looking absurdly grave, asked whether they didn't think politics a piece of tomfoolery, and why men could not enjoy themselves in their own "set" instead of worrying about the country. Having set forth his views, with many expletives, which he found it quite impossible to avoid, he wound up with the inquiry:

"Why worry about the damned country—the damned country doesn't care a damn for you?"

"The 'damned country,' as you call it," said Geoffrey, "cares a good deal for you, George, and is going to overhaul your proceedings, and going to put you in order. It says you spend too much on yourself, and you don't do anything for it, and that you've got to work. It says you must give up your

disposition to prefer grouse to sheep and pheasants to cows. You'll find it a damned interfering country."

"Then," said George, straightening himself up, "if it comes to that, I shall be a politician. Look here, now," he added, as he put down his glass with a knowing shake of the head, "what I want to know is, how can a man know anything about his place if he doesn't walk over it, and how can he walk over it if he doesn't shoot over it?"

"How can he?" asked Geoffrey.

George straightened himself up again, looked at his brother through his eye-glass, and repeated "How?" with the air of a man seeking truth through a haze.

"By his legs," said Geoffrey solemnly.

"Oh," said George, who, in default of a rejoinder, took another glass of claret and went in search of his favourite liqueur, to assist him in further reflections on the newest phases of political development.

A moment or two of embarrassment supervened, but Geoffrey was not going to be moved from his purpose, and pulling some pieces of paper from his pocket, he said:

"I've got here some passages for my election address that will interest you."

Heritage smiled, but the head of the family gasped. He was more sensible of the terrors likely to result from Geoffrey's action than anything, however distressing, associated with his heir. He was silent, however, for he longed to hear the worst.

Geoffrey informed them that it was not his whole address, but some passages he had collated with his friend Mr. Marmaduke Bray, a student at law, a journalist, and a "devilish clever fellow." Bray had promised to see him through; he understood the platform business, and knew every election trick that had ever been played.

"This is the opening," said Geoffrey, and he continued with a grandiloquent mouthing, also the result of collaboration and rhetorical study with his friend Bray:

"'With the Parliament about to be elected the country enters upon a new epoch in the constitutional history of the people, as opposed to the plutocrat and the monopolist. The Chariot of Opulence must now justify its existence, or go down beneath the wagon of the peasant, and be trampled under foot by the cart-horse of commerce.

"'The governing classes of the past must now respond to the demands of reason and of justice. Founded upon a basis

of spurious patriotism, and reared upon an unsubstantial pedestal of egotism and vanity, they have erected a wondrous fabric of pretence, and must now reap the harvest of the idler and the spendthrift.'

"That's to be my exordium," said Geoffrey, with calm disregard of the flaming countenance of his father, who in the presence of Heritage dared not permit himself to speak; and Geoffrey, in the same cool manner, announced a paragraph on party leaders, which he said he regarded as "a gem," and that it did his friend Bray great credit:

"'Now that power is to be grasped by the people there must be an end to party government; and that enemy to social progress and reform—the party leader—must be relegated to the charnel house of the criminal and the malefactor. These birds of evil who batten on the carrion of an effete institution must be dispersed to the four winds. Their actions form one long and deplorable record of treason against the State, and betrayal even of their colleagues. In the name of an honourable and self-denying patriotism they commit acts of unexampled meanness, betray those whom they designate as friends, and who are indeed their constant supporters. Impetuous, and blind to every consideration but Self, they hurry to the goal of their licentious ambition, and to achieve success they do not stop short of actions that would do credit to the card-sharper and the welsher of the racecourse.'

"That, sir," he remarked, looking straight at his father, "is the kind of thing that's going to win the elections in November."

He put up the papers, and a rapid glance at his father showed him he was nervous and irritated, but quite incapable of speech. Had Geoffrey been a stranger attacking him on the border-line of his estates, or haranguing him from the other side of the House, his mind would have girded, and his emotions would have been at rest; but the atrocity of one of his own house being the first to open up the terrors of the political future, and announce in cold blood his secession from the sacred ranks of family prestige, was too terrible for speech; and he constantly reminded himself that Geoffrey as a boy had cut the cat into strips, and hung the strips on a clothes line, merely because he had declared he would do it as the price of denial. He resolved there and then he would not cross Geoffrey.

The silence of the father was encouraging. Geoffrey turned, with a solemn air, to the unfortunate guest.

"Now, Heritage," he said, "don't you think those two or three sentences mark the temper of the hour?"

"I'm afraid," said Heritage, "there's some ground for your expectation, but I'm disinclined to grapple with these matters, which are merely the excrescences and diseases of Constitutional Government. I've no taste for clap-trap, and electoral machinery disgusts me. It's a sort of intoxication brought on by the waving of gaudy banners and the parading of forensic platitudes. Reason has little or nothing to do with any part of it, and the phantasy is almost universal. Those who cannot be candidates satisfy their vanity by being committee-men, and those who are incapable of achieving this distinction bask in the reflected glory of the gods they have created, and whom they worship with yells of passionate but senseless delight, until the poll is declared; when they go home to get sober and repent."

"We'd better go to the drawing-room," said Geoffrey, and away he went, perfectly content with his day's work and happy in his diplomacy.

"Stop," said his father to Heritage, who rose to follow. "Stop, I beg of you. Just a moment or two for reflection—no more," and he put his right hand upon the arm of his guest and waited, with a bowed head, to collect his scattered thoughts and reinvigorate his bruised pride.

"Mr. Heritage," he said in subdued tones, after an embarrassing silence, "you have seen what has happened at this table. It would be affectation in me to hide from you its terrible import and folly, or to suppress the feelings it provokes in me. If I were not sensible of the responsibilities imposed upon me as the head of this house I would accept death with satisfaction rather than endure what I see coming. Why is it?" he exclaimed with true feeling, and an honest seeking for a light that had never yet, and never would, penetrate the dense gloom that enshrouded him, and distorted every ray of social truth on the road to his twisted brain. "Why should I be so cursed? Did you see George? He's often so, and he's your friend. What can become of him? And Geoffrey, he is worse, far worse. George is a private distress, but Geoffrey is a public ruin. He appears to be consorting with our political opponents, and with the worst of them. I would care less if he inclined to the legitimate opposition. *That* might be of advantage," he continued, with a sudden gleam of cunning, "*That* might suggest to our party possible defection on my part, and

excite our friends to an anxious regard for our just claims, so as to knit us to them—yes, our just claims," he mused, nervously, and then broke out again, "but Bowdler, that dreadful, shameful, terrible man, who appears to fear neither God nor devil, and who leads a perfect horde of filthy malcontents against our most sacred privileges. Oh! terrible, terrible!"

He stopped, and pressed his hands upon his forehead; and then added in tones almost plaintive in their intensity:

"All this has happened unexpectedly. It's a shame you should have been shown it—it's a shame you should have been distressed by it. I would not speak upon it and distress you further, but I need your help. I plead with you to assist me to prevent the impending evil."

He had taken Heritage by the hand as he made the appeal, and seemed thoroughly broken and unnerved. He might have been supposed to be ten years older from the wreck the day had made of him—the pride was gone, the head was bowed, the spirit shattered, and the whole man hopelessly weak. The confession he had uttered to Heritage—for it was a confession—of the failure of his life and hope had increased his nervousness instead of relieving him, and before Heritage could reply he said plaintively:

"What have I done? What have I been saying?" and looked dreamily at his friend, still holding his hand.

"You have been saying," said Heritage, "what had better have been unsaid, but you may regard your words as unuttered; and if to-morrow you think it well to speak to me again, do so; but let this suffice for to-night."

"Thank you, thank you, Heritage. It does me good to feel you are my friend, and I shall anticipate to-morrow. Make my apologies in the drawing-room. Good-night to you."

. . . . . .

The morrow came, but no more confessions—no more weakness. The rising sun dispersed the vapours of the night; the mind revived in all its pride of race, and with added cunning. Everything that had been said and done the night before was blotted out so far as Heritage observed. From anything that occurred next day to justify reliance on his memory he might fairly have concluded he had been dreaming. Yet he discovered that my Lady Grace now treated him coldly. There had been family communings. My Lady Grace had forbidden the introduction of a stranger, however intimate a friend, within the circle of family conference; and she treated him

coldly because he had responded to her husband's appeal with generous courtesy.

Geoffrey on the morrow went to a neighbouring town, and George suffered from an unquenchable thirst—as was natural from his reflections of the night before.

CHAPTER X.

THE AFFAIR OF THE CLEUCH.

GEORGE ADOLPHUS LEUCHARS DELFOY, Junior, successor to the estates of Hanswick and Luckross, and of the Manor of Santrail, had views about the whole duty of man that would have astonished the common-place philosopher and have excited the Radical reformer to frenzy.

To those of his habit the calendar was redundant and incomplete; for although quarter days were well placed in the matter of the receiving of rents, the actual business of life was wholly neglected in them. The brief references to grouse and pheasants were all very well, but they had their origin in the exactions of the State, and in this light were objectionable. The graver subjects—the record of hunting appointments, the Waterloo Cup, the Derby, the St. Leger, and the Cesarewitch, were all ignored, and as for the Regattas, anyone would suppose from the calendars that no such thing as a yacht existed.

The year, as everyone knows, divides itself, in its natural as well as its conventional aspects, into four sections, some of which, it is true, overlap each other, but the beginning of each was and is as distinct as the changes of the moon, and certainly more regular than the reaping of the harvest. The issue of the weights and acceptances of the Spring Handicaps can be fixed to a day. There can be no excuse for the Almanac makers neglecting them. It is true the Derby is a moveable festival, but it is determined by Easter week, and all the other great events are regulated by it, including the St. Leger and Ascot Cup. In these circumstances the Almanac makers are obviously to blame. Then come the Regattas, gracefully intertwining their dates with the festivals of the paddock. Yet not one of them is even mentioned, and not a word appears in the calendar until the glorious twelfth of any of the great absorbing subjects of the year, and the tailor is no doubt never thought of. There was a time in the early part of the century

when the Almanac makers fixed the days for blood-letting and the avoidance of choleric drinks, why should they not now prescribe the times for seasonable garments, and the days for trying them on?

The knowledge of the regular progress of the great events of the year being implanted in the breasts of the Delfoys from the hour of their birth, they were in a manner independent of the almanacs, but they regarded the omission with feelings of annoyance, as reflecting on the dignity and social importance of their class. It was part, however, of the nobility of mind inherent in the character of George Adolphus Leuchars Delfoy, Junior, not to complain of the calendar in this respect. He took a brandy-and-soda and forgot its defects and omissions.

The Cleuch, the shooting of the Delfoys, had been rented by them for many generations, and was regarded by them as an essential appendage to their state, and quite as necessary as a costermonger would regard his barrow or a gardener his rake. It was also a matter of urgency and importance that the moor should be shot on the twelfth by a party invited by the son of the house, and on the twelfth of the year sixty-eight George Adolphus the younger was on the ground with his friends, and a rare day they had.

The host killed forty brace—the keepers took good care of that. Tilley, an inveterate sportsman, was pretty near him with thirty-five, and Saltoun claimed a score. Hazard, who would have made a good navvy, added about ten brace, and Heritage, who made no pretensions, about the same. This was accounted in the records of the day a respectable performance, and George Adolphus was proud of it—very proud—so proud of it, indeed, that he contemplated the figures with awe, remarked that it was a "record," and went to bed sober.

A similar result followed each day's sport for a week, and by that time the whole of the beats had been shot over once. The total was magnificent, and deserved a symposium. It had it.

Rhapsody in drink assumes a variety of forms. Even your saturnine man sometimes becomes loquacious and emotional when over invigorated, and few maintain even an appearance of their normal state in such circumstances. Delfoy's friends were unusually animated. Saltoun, who would have become a capable lawyer had he been poor, was argumentative, and Tilley, from a tendency to destructiveness, was contradictory and threatening. Hazard was gloomy, and Heritage accounted

for a certain dulness by declaring that his liver had been put out of order by contemplating Hazard's face. Delfoy was disposed to agree with everybody, but announced a preference for a fight. Tilley was quite ready to oblige him, and the two immediately closed, broke Delfoy's chair in the act, and rolled upon the floor, bumping one another's heads on the boards with becoming earnestness.

The whisky being declared in danger, peace was restored, and the varied conversation was resumed. Saltoun objected to Heritage's criticism concerning Hazard's face, and as regards his liver, desired to have his symptoms. This gave rise to a discussion on the necessary remedies, and Tilley, who had recovered his equanimity, and revived his strength by more whisky, recommended a bath. Saltoun gave the same advice, and Delfoy was certain a bath was the proper thing. Hazard was too far gone to form any opinions on the subject, and Heritage avoided controversy on so delicate and personal a matter.

The prime question having been settled, temperature was next discussed, and a cold bath was resolved on. Delfoy thereupon left the room to turn the water on, as it was not considered a matter that necessitated the aid of the domestics. During his absence a close observer would have noticed an increasing growth of vindictiveness on the part of Tilley, in the course of an argument with Saltoun as to whether it was necessary to remove Heritage's clothes. Tilley maintained it was not, and argued, with much show of reason, that the prescription was his, and not Saltoun's, and therefore he was the more capable of interpreting it. The matter was referred to Delfoy, who unhesitatingly declared that the clothes were a necessary part of the prescription, but that Heritage must drink another glass of whisky first. This he flatly refused to do, and the endeavours to force him resulted in its being applied outwardly in his case, but all the rest prepared for the contest by what they called "a good stiff tot up."

It is an undecided question, upon which no authoritative deliverance has ever been made, as to what course should be pursued by the victim of a practical joke. Those who act as aggressors always, when aggressors, declare the victim's only course is to take it quietly; and yet it is universally agreed that a victim who takes it quietly affords no satisfaction to the aggressors. It therefore comes to pass that a good victim is a poor joke; and although an undemonstrative victim may be

morally esteemed by the aggressors, he is, on the higher ground of practical joking, regarded with contempt.

Heritage knew all this, had discussed the matter often, and although convinced that quietness was the wiser course, never in any case acted up to his convictions, and sooner or later retaliated.

The onslaught in this case was conducted with vigour and determination; and Heritage, feeling that in any case it was wise to reserve his strength, offered only so much resistance as kept his friends occupied. The smoking-room opened to the hall, a stone-flagged place about twenty feet square, from which the staircase rose to a landing that passed right and left throughout the whole length of the building. The bathroom was entered from the landing looking down into the hall, and the door being open, the water was heard still running. The sound was distasteful to Heritage, and irritated him.

The four men, working with desperate energy, carried him upstairs, and abused each other with good sounding oaths for errors of judgment and execution as they did so. Tilley was counted the worst offender, because, being on the side of the banisters, he permitted Heritage too frequently to grasp the railings, and in two cases break them. The larger area of the landing enabled them to keep him clear of the railings, and he was rapidly carried to the door of the bathroom. The time had now arrived, he thought, for serious resistance, especially as his friends had by this time rather spent their strength. The doorway was narrow, and Tilley in his excitement had permitted Heritage to thrust out his left hand and grasp the jamb, while his head was actually in the room and his right shoulder on the outside of the opposite jamb.

While Tilley was fumbling with the left hand Saltoun was pulling the right arm towards Delfoy, who was viciously wrenching Heritage's right leg. Hazard had charge of the other leg, and was dreamily waiting events, which came with an appalling suddenness. Heritage drew up his right leg, bringing Delfoy with it, and then thrust it out with all the force of desperation, aided by the strong purchase his shoulder gave on the door jamb and the vigorous pulling of Saltoun. The effect was electrical. Delfoy was flung with his full weight on the railing, crashed through the balustrade, and fell head foremost to the stone flags below. The joke was played out!

The catastrophe sobered the trio in an instant. The sharp cracking of the railings as the wood parted, the yell of the

falling man, and the silence that followed the awful sickening thud upon the stone floor, brought them all on their knees in the supplication of miserable fright. Heritage, too, was horror stricken as he lay on the floor even before he had discovered the fearful character of the catastrophe. He soon scrambled to his knees and saw the sickening scene below. His was the keener repentance, for, strange to say, he alone of all the company apprehended precisely in what respect he had contributed to the result. He knew that he had lost his temper at the last moment, and knew that this final error, no matter how provoked, had been the actual immediate cause of the death of his friend and host. The others were less discriminating. All the generous instincts of their natures rose up within them, and without reflection as to cause or blame they hurried helter skelter to the rescue—but they met only death.

One—it was Tilley—fell on his knees beside his dead friend and pulled at his hands; another, Saltoun, gazed on the wreck as he approached with wide-opened eyes and fallen jaw; the third, Hazard, held his temples in his hands, in abject helplessness, unable to descend the staircase.

"Where's Heritage?" asked Tilley hoarsely. "Come, for God's sake, Heritage. Delfoy's dead. What shall we do?"

It was two in the morning, and little could be done. They carried their dead friend to the dining-room, and laid him on the table. They covered the ghastly sight with a sheet, and then, in hoarse whispers, discussed the policy of rousing the house. Heritage had left them by this time. He was out in the dark night, walking backwards and forwards in the cold mist, beside the river that ran at the foot of the park. He needed stillness and the darkness to steady his nerves, away from the petty chatter of his impotent companions. His spirit was rebellious still, he must needs justify himself, though none had blamed him, and none would ever think of doing so, for no one knew of the condemnation he had passed upon himself.

Heritage, acting for the rest, roused the head-keeper, horrified him by a statement of what had happened, and directed him to start early in the morning for the doctor and the Fiscal, so as to have them on the spot by the time Geoffrey, who was then on the road, had reached the Cleuch. Heritage then returned to the house, locked the dead man's room, and took the key to his own. Three minutes afterwards he was in bed, but not to sleep.

The Catastrophe.

Half an hour later there was a dull knock at his door, and Tilley presently entered, with his pipe in his hand and perplexity in his face.

"Look here, Heritage, old man. I mean to say I am sorry to disturb you, but we've been talking it over downstairs, and we should know what we're going to say. Geoffrey is due here about ten, and I mean to say we should tell him how it happened."

"Well?" queried Heritage, who noticed that the "talking over" downstairs had not improved the vigour of Tilley's intellect.

"Well, I mean to say that we must not tell different stories."

"Certainly," said Heritage; "that's very easy."

"Yes, it's easy in a way; but I mean to say, don't you know that of course I know it was my fault, and that I'm a damned fool. You know I proposed the bath."

"Well, and what then?"

"Why, you see, I mean to say Saltoun thinks we had better say he was leaning against the balustrade, and that being rotten, it gave way."

"Give my compliments to Saltoun," said Heritage in a rage, "and tell him I'm not a liar."

Tilley's courage waned. He stepped back toward the door, but recovering, he said:

"Oh, yes, of course, but you know the balustrade is rotten —damned rotten. Here's a bit of it all worm-eaten."

Heritage looked at the piece of wood. It was a splinter about three inches long, and worm-eaten as Tilley had said. Presently he looked up somewhat appeased. The worm-eaten wood was a great solace to him; his violence had been a mere contributory—one of a series of not altogether blameless acts, but all petty criminalities accumulating with terrible effect. Heritage reflected a minute, and then turning to Tilley, he said:

"Tilley, we must tell the plain truth. It was a low, blackguard business—a miserable drunken scrimmage—and, though I thank God I was on the defensive, it was my leg that sent him over, and Saltoun almost went too through his own drunken folly. Saltoun nearly pulled my arm out of its socket, and swung the whole weight of my body on Delfoy. NOTHING could have saved him."

Tilley carried the result of his embassy to his two lugubrious companions, and although it was not what had been desired,

it seemed the result of sounder judgment to their dazed minds. They continued, however, to smoke and discuss the situation, and when the dawn broke went to their rooms to dress for the day. They reappeared an hour or two afterwards, mere washed-out wrecks of the rubicund sportsmen of the day before, with variegated complexions in blue and white, with occasional patches of brown near the eyes, and with a listless hangdog appearance which did great credit to their consciences, and marked also their staying power in the matter of brandy and tobacco.

In due time the doctor and the Fiscal arrived. The doctor was young, and his responsibilities light; but, being young, he viewed them with gravity, and as matters for anxious thought. The Fiscal was old, and no matter how heavy his responsibilities, he declined to regard them as anything but commonplace, and to be got rid of. He was a big man, with a round red face, and tempered his law and the obligations of his office with an overpowering element of common sense.

"Now, Master Macphee," said he to the doctor, "you'll just view the corpse, and give me yer opeenion of the cause of death, and what time ye should say life became extinct. When ye've done that, docter, ye'll have naething more to think aboot."

This done, and the scene of the catastrophe examined, the gruesome spectacle of the fractured skull was recorded in matter-of-fact language, together with the further incident of the dislocation of the spinal cord. The Fiscal then proceeded to hold a court, and in twenty minutes had taken his "precognition" of all concerned. When he had concluded he discussed the matter in private with the doctor, and announced the following conclusion:

"Weel, docter, it's just as plain as the nose on yer face. They were all fou' thegether, and there was just a rotten rail betwixt Measter Delfoy and the deevil, and it was no fit for the job. That's all aboot it, and there's no muckle sense amang the whole lot o' them. So, docter, we'd better tak' a bit something for breakfast and get away to our business."

In due time Geoffrey Delfoy arrived. He had been told what had occurred by the driver of the dog-cart that met him at the railway station, and he had ample time during the hour's drive to the Cleuch to resolve the kaleidoscopic flashes of the future, which rushed upon his mind with dazzling rapidity, and resulted in an outward demeanour that the vulgar would naturally regard as fraternal emotion. The coachman

was sympathetic, and remarking the dazed appearance of Geoffrey, asked whether he should drive. Geoffrey passed his hand across his brow, and drawing a heavy breath, said "Yes," wrapped himself in all the wrappers he had, for he felt curiously cold, and mounted the cart in silence. He mused the whole journey without speaking, except to ask a few questions concerning the circumstances of his brother's death, which he projected from his multitudinous thoughts, spasmodically, and waited with impatient eagerness for the reply.

It is not given to many to construe the causes of emotional effect. The human mind, and especially such a mind as Geoffrey's, controlled by a vicious egotism of surpassing recklessness, was a sealed book; and a most misleading page was here opened up by chance, to be read by an illiterate coachman, whose judgment at this juncture was distorted by fear of losing his place. Trinder, sitting behind, could have read it better, but whatever his view, he kept it to himself, and the coachman's mind was directed to the discovery of Geoffrey's inclination concerning himself. He therefore noticed only that Geoffrey seemed startled from a comparatively light and lively manner by his report of the catastrophe, and seemed instantly reduced to a state of terror. He was in the act of complaining of the dog-cart having been sent for him instead of the wagonette, when the news silenced him, caused him to tremble, to look about aimlessly as if for help, and finally to walk away a few yards by himself without speaking. He was affected, indeed, precisely as he was on the road from the Horse Guards to Myatt's fields with Muriel three years before. It was not grief, it was not joy; it was not physical debility, but an uncontrollable nervousness resulting from the sudden intrusion upon his path of an event of great importance, so great as to be for the moment overwhelming in its influence.

At the door of the Cleuch Lodge, however, Geoffrey recovered composure; he demeaned himself with becoming gravity, but a studied reserve was associated with everything he did. Although few if any understood why it was that a sense of guilt was awakened in their minds by his mere look and manner of regarding them, yet so it was. Everyone in the place was made to feel that he was on the defensive; and he imposed and aggravated this sense of weakness by every means he could devise, especially by a studious avoidance of conversation. He made one exception, so soon as he had pos-

sessed himself of the mind of the Fiscal, and this was in the case of Heritage, with whom he took a turn or two in front of the house after seeing to the departure of the Fiscal and the doctor.

"Heritage," he said in rather stilted tones, "I have to apologise to you in the name of my family for having associated you with this unfortunate incident. The breach of hospitality has been paid for in a terrible manner; and I hope you will not deny me your company until we can leave here together with—" He waved his hand in the direction of the dining-room. "The Procurator-Fiscal has given me a certificate for burial, and there is to be no further inquiry. You will much oblige me if you can get these men to leave without offending them. They must be anxious to go away, but say from me that I trust they will stay as long as they are disposed. And apologise for my not taking part in their pursuits—you understand."

Heritage thanked him for the relief his remark gave him, and assured him an apology was the last thing he expected. It struck him as surprising, when he fully reflected on the situation, that Geoffrey should have realised with such consummate skill the sentiment that had been uppermost in his mind throughout the earlier stages of the fatal roystering. How completely had he put himself in Heritage's place, and how accurately had he imagined the irritation Heritage had felt before his temper had asserted itself. Heritage had reason to discover in later days that Geoffrey had a smack of genius about him in the rapidity and accuracy of his perceptions, and that had his moral qualities been equal to his mental, few of his compeers would have equalled him in dignity of thought and honourable achievement.

It was arranged that Geoffrey should seclude himself in his brother's room for a couple of hours, while Heritage managed matters, and Geoffrey would wait his summons to hear the result.

The feeling of admiration and gratitude to Geoffrey on the part of Heritage would have undergone a surprising revulsion, as indeed would those of the Fiscal and the doctor and the coachman, and every other person under the sun concerned about the doings of this precious scion of an ancient lineage, had they seen his face the moment he had closed and locked the door of his brother's room.

He strode to a position where he could survey the whole

room and all its contents, arranged in order by his brother's man, and left just as they had been placed the night before. He heaved a long and heavy breath, swung his arms round to open his chest, and bringing his hands on to the lapels of his coat, assumed an attitude, not of pride, not of glee, not even of pleasurable anticipation, but of a malignant and all-powerful ambition. His eyes literally sparkled with a fierce and exultant sense of newly acquired power. The aspect was shocking, beyond the power of language to convey. His glance seemed to shoot out over the most distant horizon of time, and mark down its prey with relentless flame. It cannot be said that this fierce awakening of all the latent evil of the man allowed one single spark of generous impulse or noble aspiration to temper the horrors that his soul conceived, aggravated as they were with the knowledge that the growth from which they sprang was rooted in the mangled corpse of a brother not twelve hours cold in death.

A haughty shake of the head and a bitter smile, moulded in hell itself, ended this ghastly survey, and the necessity for action was apparent. He unlocked the door and rang the bell.

Trinder appeared. He gave one rapid glance at his master, and a ray of intelligence passed over his face, to be instantly covered by his impenetrable mask.

"Get my brother's keys," he said, "especially the key of that cupboard."

It was a cupboard fixed on brackets in the angle of the wall. The keys were brought promptly, and handed with the special key already selected. Trinder vouchsafed a remark:

"They've been washed, sir," he said. "There was blood on them."

Geoffrey dropped them on the floor, and turned as white as a sheet. The stain of blood was strongly marked on the very key he was about to use, and his nerves were unstrung in an instant.

Trinder picked them up, trembling too.

"Which is the key?" asked Geoffrey.

It was shown him, and he answered:

"Give it me, and get out."

Trinder went, and, suppressing his nervousness, Geoffrey opened the cupboard. It contained half a bottle of brandy and some glasses. He brought them out and carried them to the table. Having locked the door again, he drank a wine

glass of brandy, then he sat and brooded. The boldness was gone, and something of a miserable shrinking was upon him. He muttered oaths incoherently, and then drank another wine glass of brandy, this time with water. The spirit revived his composure, and he looked about him for writing materials. He sat down, with a gloomy countenance, and wrote:

"My dear Wife—"

Then revived the grim and cynical smile as he looked at the writing. Shaking his head and grinning the while he tore the sheet in pieces as he said:

"No, no. Enough of that. 'Dear Muriel.' That's better."

"Dear Muriel"—he wrote,—"My brother is dead, and my regiment is ordered abroad. I don't know when I shall see you, but the agents have their orders.—Yours truly,

"G."

He folded it up deliberately and addressed it. Is it too trite to say that the bull-pup would have behaved with more of human kindness?

There was another letter, now made necessary by the new order of things, and that was equally curt. It ran:

"My dear Bray,—Let your friends in Parliament Street know that through the sudden death of my brother, in very distressing circumstances, I am compelled to decline standing for Parliament at the General Election as proposed.

"I will write to you within the next ten days, making an appointment.—Yours very truly,

"Geoffrey Delfoy."

The "Younger sons and the Proletariat" was no longer, in his opinion, an apposite cry. There was no longer a younger son in the whole world worth a moment's consideration in Geoffrey Delfoy's thinking, successor to the estates of Hanswick and Luckross and of the Manor of Santrail.

CHAPTER XI.

FOR THE HONOUR OF THE FAMILY.

THE elections were over, the Government of the dissolution had resigned, the ministerial crisis was being enacted before the assembling of Parliament, and while the triumphant majority were celebrating their victory, and their leaders were squabbling over the spoils of success, the defeated were counting the cost of political fervour, and devising personal economies under the guise of rest, retirement, and patriotic umbrage.

Mr. Delfoy had been returned by a majority of two, and could not doubt that this success had been achieved for him by his son Geoffrey, whose oratory had been a cause of enthusiasm in the county, and whose capacity for trimming was the envy of the wirepullers. Since the death of his brother he had shown that the turning of one's coat is not the exclusive privilege of eminent party leaders, and Geoffrey would have responded to any reflections upon his political variation by saying that the question whether a coat should be turned or not depended entirely on the fit. He had, however, a great advantage over most politicians of this class. No one had seen his old coat but those whose anxiety was even greater than his own to keep its character to themselves.

Lady Grace away at Nice—away from the noise and discomfort of the elections, thought the majority of two an insult and a degradation. Her theory of representation was that the member should be evolved by natural selection from the electors, should be drawn by importunity from dignified seclusion, and pleaded with to do the multitude the great service of ruling them. Associated with this theory was the belief that the only possible evolution in their case was the selection of a Delfoy, a belief that the majority of two had for the first time brought within the area of doubt.

The head of the house and the son of the house had joined my Lady Grace at Nice, where Mr. Delfoy anticipated at least three weeks of fresh air and supposed retirement before

commencing his duties as a legislator. He was perfectly content to let the new Ministry form itself, and the new House of Commons elect its Speaker and swear itself in, and metaphorically sweep and garnish the House and make it ready for so distinguished a member as himself. These mechanical arrangements he left to the new members, and especially to those of the late opposition exultant in their success. It became him rather to ascend, in imagination, to the upper chamber of the temple of superiority, and gaze in sorrowful regret at the squalid spectacle of the new majority.

This was his public aspect, but gnawing at his heart was the demon of impecuniosity, and the more mysterious influence of an uncertain fear. What did Geoffrey intend? What would influence him? How could he be approached?

Since the election Mr. Delfoy's fear of Geoffrey had become more continuous and more pronounced. He was scarcely conscious of the fact, would have resented the suggestion if anyone had dared to assert it, and even if he had recognised the feeling, would have been unable to assign a single tangible reason for its existence. He was conscious, however, of suffering from a nervous dread that something undesirable was likely to happen. His imagination ran riot among the possible terrors the daring spirit of his son might devise for his own gratification, and his father's and everybody else's confusion.

They took their *dejeûner* at the Restaurant de la Réserve, these two—father and son, obtrusively polite to each other, ridiculously attentive and conciliatory, and each watching the other in all his movements, speech, attitude, and expression, in the hope of spying a chink in the armour: common wrestlers watching for a throw. What can be said for that social custom which makes a man's son his competitor from the day of his birth; which makes him perhaps for one-and-twenty years a passive and irremovable obstacle to the fulfilment of a thousand and one inclinations, more or less unwise and improper, perhaps, but possibly prudent and useful; which creates a bar to enterprise as to dissipation, and resists the universal law of mutation by fixing the limits of succession before there is anyone to succeed? And yet it may be asked what natures could those be who, being of the same blood, the one to nurture and the other to revere, could spend their hours in digging pitfalls for each other, and watching for opportunity of advantage; and, still further may it be asked, what system

could be devised that could restrain such natures from doing any wrong that seemed to them a means of gratifying even a whim?

They lacked nothing, these two, that any heart should wish. Some people, who have made it the business of their life to ruin their digestions, cannot take *bouillabaisse*, but these two enjoyed the famous dish of Southern France with much circumstance; and the father took occasion especially to hide his thoughts and intentions under a flood of exclamations at the delights of the *cuisine* of the locality. But by-and-by, when the *dejeûner* had ended, they had nothing but the coffee and cigars and the ethereal blue of the Mediterranean to discourse upon; and when they found the ethereal blue rather beyond their practical souls, the ice must needs be broken—and the father broke it.

"About the future, Geoffrey? What are your views?"

He asked it in a somewhat frivolous manner, examining the ash of his cigar with an appearance of carelessness, and yet frowning and pursing his lips. He had been watching for an opportunity to put that question for three months, as he had watched before and put it to George, and as he had put it to George with indifferent result. He put it again almost, as his mind comprehended the position, to the same person, in only slightly varied circumstances. The remainder man was to him the successor, nothing else; the creation of the family solicitor, and of social custom—a being who had come to pass, and whether named George or Geoffrey he had to be conciliated and cajoled.

So fully did he recognise the existence of a Delfoy in succession as a matter of course, and as a necessary and proper appendage to the family, that he never once encouraged the feeling of regret that he could not do as he liked with his property, but uniformly persuaded himself that inasmuch as the family required a Delfoy in succession, so the successor should have rights that he as a Delfoy must respect. The recognition of this traditional feeling led in logical sequence not only to regarding his son as a competitor in rights and titles, but of inciting him by every endeavour that cunning could devise to restrict these undoubted rights, and even if possible to destroy them. Thus it came to pass that while he would not have been without a son and successor for untold gold, and would have died rather than not have settlements, he spent the best part of his days in devising modes of robbing

the one and paring down the other. Therefore he asked, with studied carelessness:

"About the future, Geoffrey? What are your views?"

Geoffrey's views regarding the future were far more definite than his father's, but he thought it prudent to say he had none, and yawned as he said so. This reduced his father to a state of doubting silence so long of duration that Geoffrey, desirous of having the subject pursued, inquired with the air of ingenuous youth:

"Views about what?"

"Well," said his father, much relieved, and assuming an air of unconcerned deliberation, "marriage, for instance," as if he had just that moment thought of it, having excavated the idea with much labour from out of the whole range of human experience as applied to his son's future. "Marriage," he repeated, and nodded his head at the Mediterranean.

"Oh, yes," said Geoffrey, "I've thought of it, but what's the use of thinking, with nobody to marry and nothing to marry on?"

There was a slight variation to Mr. Delfoy's usually dignified stolidity, a sudden glance sideways at his son, a glint of pleasure in his dull eyes as Geoffrey uttered these words.

"True," he answered, resuming his reflective manner and again nodding at the Mediterranean, this time with evident signs of approval.

"But," he added, "has it never occurred to you that the person to marry might provide the means to marry on, and do what we sadly need — er — really, you know — er — rehabilitate us?"

"Where is she?" asked Geoffrey, with a directness and decision that might have led his father to suppose he was ready that moment to lead any lady to the British Consul he could produce answering to the conditions, and marry her at the earliest possible moment.

Mr. Delfoy was gratified, and said jocularly:

"That's your part, Geoffrey. You must discover the lady, but you'll find me ready to do anything you require to facilitate matters."

"Ah," said Geoffrey gravely, and the next moment he appropriated the solemn manner of his father, with only youth to distinguish them, so ponderous did he become when submitting a weighty and urgent proposition. "Ah," said he, "if that is your view, I think you had better begin at once, because

it is impossible to move in this affair without some spare cash," and he nodded, as his father had done, to give evidence of his decision.

"We had better sell something," said the Delfoy in possession.

"Very well, sell," said the Delfoy in succession.

Then they looked at each other, feeling their way like two hucksters at a fair. Presently the father asked timidly:

"What shall I sell?"

And the son answered, with increased decision:

"Anything you like. How do I know what you should sell? You have it: I haven't."

The designing parent's jaw dropped.

"Are you aware," he asked, "that this means breaking the settlement?"

"Then break it," said the son, wagging his head and emphasising his words with his cigar in the air; "break it. We want ready money—both of us. If we cannot get it without breaking and selling, we must break and sell."

And he went on smoking. The readiness with which he assented to this dreadful expedient, only half expressed, awakened the father's suspicions, and although it was the very thing he wanted, the ease of its acquisition alarmed him. He became still more doubtful of the security of his stepping-stones a few moments after, when Geoffrey produced a piece of paper, asked him questions, put down his answers, and showed him in ten minutes that he knew nothing of the state of his affairs, and inferentially proved he was not fit to manage his business. From this it was a simple step for Geoffrey to suggest that he should manage it for him, and before the interview closed he was commissioned to instruct the family solicitor to cut, mortgage, sell, realise, and do anything he liked, with the object of providing themselves with twenty-five thousand pounds each at their banker's. As Geoffrey put it, necessity was their law: they had to put their affairs in order, and it was of no use attempting to begin a work of that magnitude without ready money. Ready money, he told his father, made a man feel able to meet the world, and he expatiated at some length on the charms of a balance in cash and no debt, as compared with a balance of debt and no cash, and generally on the overwhelming superiority of ready money over prospective revenues. When he had finished rehearsing these views, his father began to feel quite easy about the future of his estates, and his peace

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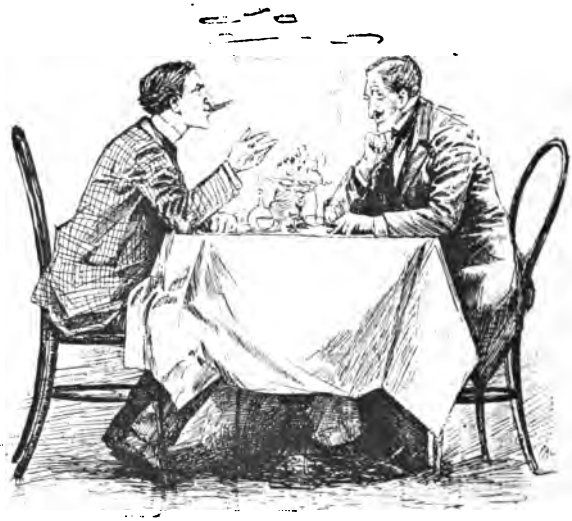
of mind was discounted only by a feeling that Geoffrey would have the best of him in the bargain if he didn't take care. To insure against this he resolved to write a private note to his solicitor, requesting him to remember that in taking Geoffrey's instructions he was in all matters of doubt to act specially in his interest as against his son.



"Now, Geoffrey," he said, continuing the consultation, "as we should understand each other perfectly, would you mind—er—telling me—how you propose to act—how, in fact, you intend to proceed in this matter of the marriage?"

"I must first clear the decks," said he, with his eye on a distant steamer.

"Any difficulties?" asked the father, with a return of his nervousness and suspicion. "I presume," he added, with great hesitation, "I may take it that you are not already married?"

"No, not quite. Very nearly, but not quite," answered Geoffrey reflectively, looking at his boots, as if still in doubt how nearly he was married.

The answer increased his father's nervousness.

"I suppose you are aware," he said, "that rumours have been current about you—rumours that you were married some years ago and have an establishment in town?"

"Ah," said Geoffrey reflectively, "that would no doubt arise from an erroneous impression on the part of the lady. She probably imagines—indeed, I feel sure she imagines—that she is married to me."

"Good Lord, Geoffrey, how you talk!" exclaimed the father. "'She imagines,' you say? How can she imagine such a thing if you are not married? You astound me! I must be assured, or the thing we have arranged cannot be completed. The honour of the family requires that I should be assured."

"No doubt," answered Geoffrey, as if still reflecting, and then turning, with a cynical expression on his face, he asked: "You don't suppose I should not know whether I am married or not, do you?"

"Then be good enough to explain. Were you married at the Registrar's?"

"No, thank God, that would have finished me."

"In a church?"

"Yes."

"By a clergyman?"

"An imitation clergyman."

"Gracious heavens, that's a felony!"

"On the part of the imitation clergyman."

"And on yours"

"Well, nearly, but not quite. You see, you've got to prove knowledge on my part, and the lady is evidence I had none. Besides, I had the Archbishop's licence."

"Then how in the name of Heaven did this sham clergyman get the church at his disposal?"

"Bought it."

The head of the family gasped, and Geoffrey added:

"He didn't actually buy it. He agreed to buy it, and paid a deposit of fifty pounds, the purchase to be completed in a

fortnight, and he's never since been heard of anywhere under the sun. His name was Brill."

The head of the Delfoys, erect, and excited by feelings of amazement and alarm, glared at his son and heir, speechless. Geoffrey was carefully lighting another cigar, and stopping in the middle, said:

"Brill forfeited his fifty pounds, of course," and went on with a puff, puff. His father remaining speechless, he added: "You need not alarm yourself. The parish was the wrong parish, the parson wasn't a parson, and there was no registration. The only genuine things about the whole business were the Archbishop's licence and the lady's belief."

"And discovery?" asked the father.

"Well, discover Brill," said Geoffrey, who was getting impatient at his parent's stupidity; "and when you have discovered Brill, see whether you can get him to make admissions that will give him penal servitude. I don't think you will."

Light began to break in upon the head of the family, and his feelings subsided. But he asked, with an apparent indignation:

"Don't you think you've acted like a scoundrel?"

"For the honour of the family," replied Geoffrey, with a bow, which directed his father's thoughts into another channel.

"And this woman," said he, "what will she do?"

"This 'woman,' as you call her, is far too gentle and charming to do anything vulgar or absurd."

"She is a lady, then?" exclaimed the father, exhibiting signs of increased alarm.

"Not exactly what the mother would call 'a lady,'" said Geoffrey reflectively; "but she would pass in a crowd."

"And if she is so," exclaimed the father, "why have you treated her in this dastardly manner, sir?"

"For the honour of the family," repeated Geoffrey, with a lower bow and a still more cynical smile.

There was another pause, during which Geoffrey smoked placidly. Then turning to his father, he said:

"We need not refer to this matter again; but if you prefer it, if you really feel that you would like the lady for a daughter, I am quite ready to throw over Brill and legitimatise the marriage. I am doubtful whether it can be done in any case, but I don't mind trying, if you really think I am a scoundrel, to put her and her children on a correct footing—for the honour of the family!"

There was no answer.

"If we throw over Brill, I think it can be done," he said reflectively, toying with his cigar. "Yes; I can make an application to the Courts to get the registration made, on the ground that we have been deceived by a supposititious clergyman. That's good law. We have no need to find Brill to do that."

He glanced from the corner of his eye at his father, and observing a look of horror on his face, he continued:

"Brill has been guilty of felony, no doubt and we are innocently unmarried, eh? That's the situation, eh? Suppose we have it put right, eh?" And he looked his father full in the face.

"Good God! Geoffrey, what are you talking about?" exclaimed the head of the house.

"The honour of the family, dad! Ha, ha! All right, dad. I was only joking. The honour of the family is such a capital joke."

"Ah," added Geoffrey, "you don't think the 'honour of the family' needs that sacrifice? Nor more do I. Suppose you leave the matter to me; and if any ideas occur to you about the future marriage, let me know. Yes. We must consider the honour of the family, above all things."

CHAPTER XII.

A LITTLE LEGACY.

TORRINGTON SQUARE is one of the vestiges of an earlier metropolitan respectability. It consists of two rows of very tall thin houses, divided by a narrow strip of railed garden ground, in which are planted a few hardy trees and shrubs, that do their best to justify the action of the architect and builder who had the courage to sqeeze it in among the more pretentious squares around it. Torrington Square is not, and never was a square, nor even a parallelogram; and it is recorded in the minds of the inhabitants of the district, and especially of the descendants of the Vestrymen, that a mathematician, living in Russell Square hard by, at the time Torrington Square came into existence, had formally protested against its being called "a Square," and had applied to the Court of King's Bench for a *mandamus* to compel the owners and the Vestry to amend the name, and to make it consistent with truth and propriety. The inhabitants, however, having discovered that there was a covert intent on the part of the Authorities to assent to naming the place Torrington Rhomboid, out of deference to the sensibilities of the eminent mathematician, assembled in their thousands and riotously demanded the retention of the more familiar designation. With a view to enforce their opinions, and put their intention beyond doubt, they broke the eminent mathematician's windows, in recognition of his interference, and such of them as were Freemasons assembled, as masons do, upon the square in a neighbouring hall and established "The Torrington Lodge," to celebrate their triumph and mark their consistency.

The Square was originally tenanted by an aspiring colony of the penurious genteel, and struggled vigorously to maintain an air of respectability for several years; but as in course of time the aristocracy departed westward, the tall thin strips of houses, which internally seemed to be devoted almost entirely to an arrangement for providing a front door and a staircase, became

the resource of the retired butler and the ambitious cook, and to this day is the resort of the genteel lodger.

Mrs. Littercan had never been a cook, nor Littercan a butler. It has already appeared that he was something on the railway, and was usually "down the line." The Littercans had become lodging-house keepers by force of circumstances. They found themselves possessed of a legacy of furniture far beyond their needs, and were urged by the possession, beyond all power of resistance, to furnish a house and let it out to lodgers, although, as Mrs. Littercan frequently reiterated to her confidential friends, "There weren't no call to do it, no more than nothing."

Jemmy, aged nine, was the cause of this unnecessary enterprise on the part of the Littercan family. He was a large-headed, flat-faced boy, with a turn-up nose and a straight mouth, but he was a sharp boy, and the foundation stone of his mother's ambitions. He was to have a good start in life and to this end his mother let lodgings and saved money.

Mrs. Littercan lived in the basement, and Jemmy was hanging up "A Merry Christmas," on a string across the top panes of the window, when he observed an elderly gentleman arrive at the front door. The unusual fact was announced, and Mrs. Littercan said it must be the doctor come to see Mrs. Lucas, but this was denied by Jemmy, on the ground that the gentleman's hat and the gentleman's boots were different, he might have said defective and dilapidated, and that the gentleman was smaller and older, and was taking snuff after ringing the bell, all of which appearances were against the gentleman being Mrs. Lucas's doctor; and this Mrs. Littercan found was the case when she opened the front door and showed the gentleman into the front room by the name of Barcham.

"Barcham, ma'am, of the firm of Barcham, Newmans & Thirl, and by appointment with Mrs. Lucas—yes."

He said it like an automaton, holding his hat in his hand, and wound up his remark by jerking out the monosyllable "yes" after a pause, as if he had repeated the statement to himself and desired to confirm its accuracy.

Mrs. Littercan doubted whether Mrs. Lucas could see the gentleman, "which she was only jest gettin' about and wasn't very strong-like."

But the old gentleman insisted that he had given her notice in a letter of his intended call, that his business was most im-

portant, and that it would be much to Mrs. Lucas's advantage to see him.

All this having been conveye l by Mrs. Littercan to Muriel upstairs, sitting in a cosy easy-chair before the fire, with many wraps on, and looking very pale, it was arranged that Julie should take the two elder children into the adjoining room, and that the nurse should carry off the latest comer upstairs during the few minutes the interview should last.

Mr. Barcham was then admitted, a very old and wrinkled piece of humanity, brown with age and shrivelled, but mentally as alert as a weasel, and as lissom as threescore could possibly allow.

"Mr. Barcham, I presume?" said Muriel, as she sat with her cheek resting on her hand.

Mr. Barcham gave a little start as he remarked the marvellous beauty of the convalescent, for although he was in no sort a victim to sentiment, and never could depart from the lines of law and practice as set forth by authority and precedent, he was startled by the calm dignity and passive resistance of her large dark eyes, that concentrated, all unconsciously, the silent communings of long days and nights alone, for she had now for a long time been absolutely alone so far as any interchange of the deeper thoughts and feelings were concerned.

She seemed to be gradually awakening in her loneliness to the knowledge that the shadows of the past were closing in, to the fear that a declaration was at hand announcing some shameful resolution on Geoffrey's part presaging sunless wastes of desolation for her future. The look of anxious inquiry that followed her first recognition of Mr. Barcham's presence was the concentration of all the doubts and fears and commanding resolutions of the past five months—of all the patient waiting and hoping and fell endurance, with not a single ray of hope to inspire her, and nothing even to nerve her to resist the blow of treachery she felt would come, save the consciousness of helpless probity and the daring instinct of the mother.

Mr. Barcham recovered himself.

"Barcham, Newmans & Thirl, ma'am," said he, "of whom I am Barcham—yes." Then he took a pinch of snuff, saying: "Excuse me, madam; it is not perhaps agreeable, but it's necessary—quite necessary, and I may say imperative—yes."

There was a pause, during which Mr. Barcham sat himself

on the edge of a chair and produced a letter, unsealed, from his pocket. Holding it aloft in his hand, as indicating the necessity for special attention, he said:

"Madam, we have written you a letter announcing this call. We have written you another letter specifically dealing with the business of this call, in order that Barcham, Newmans & Thirl may be committed to you. Some firms are afraid of committing themselves. We are not. We desire to commit ourselves, in order that the interests of our clients may be protected. We have done so in this case. We place ourselves, ma'am, in your power by this letter, in very peculiar circumstances—yes."

He finished his remark with the "yes," as indicating a conclusion, and looked at the convalescent, firmly holding the letter aloft as if expecting a rejoinder. None came. Muriel was in a sense dazed, and waited. An expression of pain overshadowed her features, and the large dark eyes were stricken with an appearance of timid shrinking. Mr Barcham observed this, and said he:

"Perhaps, ma'am, you would prefer that I read the letter. It is short, and I will explain it to you as I go along. Is that your pleasure? It is?—yes," added the lawyer, remarking a slight inclination of the head by Muriel.

"The letter," he said, removing it from the envelope, is as follows:

"'To Mrs. Muriel Balmain, commonly known as Mrs. Lucas.

"'Madam—'"

"Why that form of address?" asked Muriel; "why 'commonly known'?"

"We are so instructed," said Mr. Barcham. "I apprehend that is not your real name: we are *so* instructed—yes. I will proceed," he added, for Muriel had relapsed from the state of violent exaltation into which she had been thrown by this disagreeable description of herself to one of almost passive endurance. The nervous energy that could sustain a burst of indignation was not equal to a steady contest with a legal cogwheel. She listened.

"The letter runs," said Mr. Barcham:

"'We are instructed to inform you that we have placed in our hands certain shares and coupons, a register of which is herewith annexed by the Executors of the late Miss Gabrielle Wren, who in a private memorandum confided to the care of

the said Executors, are desired by the testatrix to set apart the revenues accuring therefrom for your benefit, and to be disposed of as you may desire.'"

"Who is Miss Gabrielle Wren?" asked Muriel, again awakening to a sense of the reality of the scene. "I never heard of her."

"That," said Mr. Barcham, "is probably the case. She, however, we are instructed, remembers you. The important fact, however, is that we, Barcham, Newmans & Thirl, acknowledge to be in possession of securities giving you a revenue of at least three hundred a year, and that we commit ourselves to you—'*commit*,' I repeat, '*ourselves to you*'—to account for that sum."

Mr. Barcham stopped and looked at Muriel, weakly lying in her cushions, amazed, as well he might be, that any human being could sit unmoved at the unheard of occurrence of a circumspect firm of lawyers committing themselves to anything, seeing that all their lives are devoted to resisting everybody, disputing everything, believing nobody, and doing nothing unless ordered by the High Court. But Muriel knew none of these things. She felt she was alone: with a nurse, who was a tyrant, with Julie, who was a child, and with Mrs. Littercan, who was a dear good soul, but only the wife of Littercan "down the line," and the mother of Jemmy, who wheeled Theodora in the perambulator for pleasure—good homely people, according to their lights and longings; but where was Geoffrey, the desire of her soul, the light of her eyes, the strength of her arm? She was alone!

"Allow me to take a pinch of snuff," said Mr. Barcham. "I assure you, madam, it is necessary, though disagreeable perhaps to you—yes!"

Mr. Barcham took a pinch of snuff, with the usual accompaniment of the waving of a red silk pocket handkerchief and the dispersal of atoms that had missed their mark over his shirt front and waistcoat.

"The letter proceeds, madam," said Mr. Barcham:

"'We are further instructed that the private memorandum left by the testatrix for the direction of her Executors contained a statement to the effect that the cause of this setting apart of funds in behalf of yourself arose out of an incident that came under the testatrix's observation when you were not more than four years old, and is an expression of her admiration of your spirit of tenderness and regard for the feelings of dumb animals

as exemplified in a scene of unexampled anger, in one so young, upon observing a person of mature years hold up a little dog by the tail to ascertain "whether he was game."'"

"The observation 'whether he was game,'" remarked Mr. Barcham apologetically, "is copied from the actual document, at least so we are instructed."

"'We are your obedient servants, Barcham, Newmans & Thirl,'" recited Mr. Barcham ostentatiously, and folding up the letter, he placed it in its envelope and handed it to Muriel.

"We are now," he said, standing with his hand on the back of his chair, "at your service, madam—yes, at your service. We acknowledge the possession of these securities, and propose, with your permission, to administer them in your behalf —yes."

Muriel did not answer. Her mind seemed numbed. She looked absently at the old man as he went on:

"The executors, madam, of the late Miss Gabrielle Wren leave you in undisturbed control of the principal, as they are bound to do; but they recommend us to advise you that the investments should remain undisturbed, and we do so advise, madam. The investments are sound, and return a moderate interest. We are of opinion that they cannot be improved upon with safety—with safety, madam, yes."

Muriel sighed, and lifted her hand nervously as she turned her head away from the garrulous old man. She was, in fact, unable to follow him, and almost indifferent. The consequences of the communication in relation to the future of her children had not yet dawned upon her.

"I should add," continued Mr. Barcham after a short pause, "that we have already, in accordance with instructions and at the expense of the executors, seen to the registration of the various shares in your name; and we have pleasure in assuring you that everything in this respect is in order. We expect in a few weeks to have the new scrip handed to us in your name, and shall have pleasure in awaiting your instructions. In default of instructions," added the old man with special emphasis, "we shall draw the dividends and hand them to you as they become due." Still observing no sign of interest he compressed his lips, coughed, grasped the back of the chair more firmly and said, as if forcing his words into the brain of the passive figure:

"You referred, madam, to the manner in which we ad-

dressed you in that letter. We were so instructed—yes. Have you any further observations to make, or will you permit me? Yes."

Muriel still made no answer, and he continued in hard grinding tones:

"We were anxious to address you in proper legal form, and being so instructed, we made inquiries. We cannot find, madam, that you are entitled in law to be addressed by any other than your maiden name. There does not appear to have been registration."

Muriel started forward.

"Of what?" she asked.

"Of marriage."

"There was a licence."

"Probably, madam, but no registration. Unfortunate, madam, but it sometimes happens," he added, taking his hat. "It sometimes happens—yes."

He was moving to the door as she asked with a sudden accession of energy:

"You say I am not married?"

"That is my belief—my conviction. I advise you to assume that it is so. You would be under a misapprehension in thinking otherwise—yes."

He jerked out the answer in short snatches, as if watching the effect of each succeeding stab. He was probably gratified to observe the effectiveness of his method. Muriel's pale face became paler. She raised her hand as if to seize upon some possible support, and without a cry fainted away.

The lawyer methodically rang the bell, and to Mrs. Littercan, who answered as fast as her portly frame permitted, he said, with some trepidation:

"Little legacy, my good woman. Sudden accession of good fortune sometimes overcomes."

"Brute!" exclaimed Mrs. Littercan, rushing to Muriel; "the old villain!"

"No, my good woman, I assure you, a little legacy. She'll tell you when she recovers."

And with this he went downstairs, almost as composedly as he had come up.

Five minutes afterwards he was standing at the door of a brougham drawn up in the Crescent, in Store Street, in which was seated Geoffrey Delfoy smoking cigarettes by the dozen.

A Little Legacy.

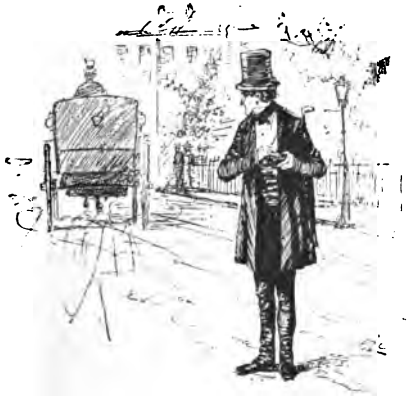
"Everything quite satisfactory, I assure you," he was saying, "everything."

"You've been a frightfully long time about it," grumbled Geoffrey. "I'm tired to death."

"Not a moment lost, sir, I assure you—not a moment."

"It should have been done quicker, Mr. Barcham. I'm very much annoyed. I sha'n't have time now to get shaved."

Mr Barcham, although a lawyer, and not a moral philosopher, watched the departing brougham as he took a pinch of snuff, and reflected upon the selfishness of man in relation to woman.



END OF THE SECOND PERIOD.

Morris Heritage

THIRD PERIOD: THE SEVENTIES.

CHAPTER XIII.

WINDOW DRESSING IN HIGH QUARTERS.

Mr. Alfred Chippering had reviewed the position and resolved upon a new course, for the affair of the neckties and cockade had sunk deeply into his soul. The Beeches had been let to a couple of maiden ladies of the county, and Mr Chippering approached the question of manorial proprietorship on new lines. Recognising his inability to make money and spend it himself at the same time with efficiency in both cases, he made up his mind to achieve his purpose of attacking society by another and surer method than that of intrusion among the county families. Why he should have wanted to intrude among the county families, or attack society in any way whatever, was one of the mysteries of social experience that never cease to perplex the world. It is, however, an invariable condition of the imaginative and energetic tradesman or manufacturer to appropriate a new ambition as soon as the old has been gratified; and to the truly successful merchant the practice of money getting palls when unalloyed by new and varied excitement.

Mr. Chippering reasoned with perfect accuracy when he pointed out to himself that if he could not make and spend money at the same time he must determine which of the two conflicting ambitions of life he would make his own. He was wise in concluding that if he spent without making he would become a pauper, while if he made without spending he would get no pleasure from his wealth and pluck but acrid fruit from his labour. He therefore determined to spend, and as a preliminary to doing so, as became a possessor of great wealth, he would first procure leisure for the new occupation he designed for himself.

He cast his eyes, in the first place, upon the Chippering young men scattered over the country and engaged with all their might and main in pouring the wealth of the accumulated farthings into the Chippering treasury. He called for the accounts of each of them, pored over them, rejected the inefficient young men, made a short leet, and selected one who resorted to the flattery of starting an agent of his own. "That's the man for me," said Mr. Chippering, and he went to look at him.

Among the various aphorisms invented or appropriated by Mr. Chippering, as rules for the conduct of business, was one that enjoined upon all mankind the expediency of dividing labour, and condemning the folly of assuming that any one man can do everything. "Never do anything yourself," said Mr. Chippering, "that you can get anyone else to do for fourpence." Other men have said, "Never do anything yourself that you can get another to do better," and some have approved the proposition that no man should do that which he could pay another to do for him, but there was a world of Chippering wisdom in the "fourpence," suggesting economy, hard bargaining, and wise selection. Mr. Chippering selected for the purpose under consideration the young man who had created an agent of his own, brought him back to the head warehouse, set him in authority, and kept his eye on him.

The result was surprising. Mr. Chippering absented himself from the warehouse for gradually increasing periods, and finally at the end of four years became a Member of Parliament, took a house in Berkeley Square, and devoted himself wholly to the spending of money, without a thought about neckties or muslin, except in his dreams, but some of these it must be confessed were trying.

Part of the great business success of Mr. Chippering consisted in his capacity in the art of "dressing the window," and even when he had reached the acme of his commercial success he frequently took a secret pride in criticising the drapers' windows of Regent Street and Oxford Street, and flattering himself as he passed them how much better he could have done it.

His great idea in dressing a window had been to concentrate his energies, if possible, on one thing, which he described in the trade jargon as the leading "line." If it were gloves, he would make pyramids of them, castles, chequered patterns, stars, avalanches. If muslins: monuments, rainbows, cascades. In

all cases he endeavoured to flood the mind of the passer-by with the one thing.

He pursued the same policy in Berkeley Square. He dressed the window with Amy, his leading "line," and labelled her, "Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling." He knew she was last season's goods, rather faded in the colour, and of an obsolete pattern, but he ventured to think the material was substantial and the "value undeniable." But she did not go off and the window had to be dressed in another style, with Amy as a job lot in the background.

The fact is, the balls and receptions were not a success from the Chippering standpoint. The contractors excelled themselves—they spared neither their resources nor the Chippering treasury—the florist revelled in the greatest opportunities he had ever had, and the visitors seemed all to enjoy themselves immensely among themselves without any regard to the Chipperings, who from all appearances had nothing whatever to do with the matter. Despite black velvet, false hair and marabout feathers, Mrs. Chippering entered her drawing-room with a consciousness of impending failure, and she left it, after the departure of her guests, with the feelings of a mill-horse going to his stable. She would rather have cleaned the doorstep than preside at a ball, but "Chippering was such a wilful man and would have them." So the season was gone through in Berkeley Square, and at its close "the fashionable intelligence" announced the departure of Mrs. and Miss Chippering to Homburg.

Mr. Chippering, as "the fashionable intelligence" did not announce, took a month with the Chippering young men, and was gratified to find that his wealth increased in proportion as he left the young men alone. The great question of making and spending at the same time was thus solved, and the Member of Parliament having "disposed of certain matters of importance to his constituency," which was the way the fashionable intelligence described the return of the Member to the atmosphere of muslins and hosiery, joined his family on the Riviera, whither they had migrated, towards the close of October, thoroughly satisfied with himself and his affairs on all points, except in the small matters of the Berkeley Square window dressing, concerning which he conversed with Mrs. Chippering, during an afternoon walk, in the spirit of the haberdasher remonstrating with one of his shopwalkers.

"The result, Mrs. Chip," said he, "has not been satis-

factory. It has been very costly, and it had made us no return."

"I'm not surprised at that," answered Mrs. Chippering, trailing laboriously along a promenade that she wished was in Jericho, and still more wished herself in Camberwell. "You know I hate it, Alfred. I hate pretending and the like."

"Now, Mrs. Chip, you're wrong," said the little man. "You're making a mistake, Mrs. Chip. You're not going the right way about it, Mrs. Chip. You're not doing the proper thing, Mrs. Chip."

"No, Alfred, I daresay I'm not, but I can't help it, because I don't like it, and I can't change my nature. So there's an end of it."

"No, Mrs. Chip, not quite an end of it. There's something more. If you won't do a thing, you won't, and we shall have to make a change, and the change will cost money, and you are responsible for the sacrifice."

"No, Alfred," responded Mrs. Chip. "Not me responsible. I only want to live quiet and comfortable at home. I'm not the least anxious about society and this sort of thing," flinging her hand testily at the highly ornamental promenaders. "I'm a plain woman, and I don't like grandeur and flummery and things. I didn't like The Beeches, and I don't like Berkeley Square, and I don't like riding about in a carriage and pair. I prefer Margate and a camp stool."

"Oh!" said Chippering at this sudden and most unusual outburst, and he pondered in silence over the diversity of tastes discovered by circumstances in a circle so small even as his own family trio.

His own tastes were cosmopolitan. At least he said so. He did as Rome did—preferred as many Romes as possible—and smiled and strutted and made himself busy wherever he went. He even went to Monte Carlo, cautious, unspeculative trader as he was, and responded to what he conceived to be the requirements of his position by patronising the tables. He risked three maximums at *trente et quarante*, won two of them, and retired with the air of a man who had fulfilled his social mission. The Prince of Monaco could expect no more of him.

The opening of the new year found Mr. Chippering working on surer lines. The ineffectual ball and supper must give way to the Parliamentary dinner-party. He took the largest house he could get in the neighbourhood of Queen Anne's Gate, and

it was put about the House that Chippering was going to assist the Whips by keeping a dozen good diners at hand throughout the sitting, and bring them back at ten without fail, or earlier if summoned. Chippering was regarded as a good member on this account, but he rather belied his reputation by mixing up parties at his dinner-table with what some of the stricter disciples declared to be an indecent recklessness. He defended himself by assuring his friends that he saved the Whips the trouble of pairing, and with that strict attention to business forms which had characterised him from his youth up, he always handed a list of his dinner-table to the Whips, that they might see how cleverly he neutralised the absenteeism of his own side. This device frequently resulted in Chippering and his dinner-party being left alone when the town was being scoured for votes.

Amy rather liked the change of programme, and her mother felt the new order of things was more within her grasp. It was more within her grasp, because the arrangements were placed quite beyond her control, and she had nothing to do but sit at table with the guests and see the machinery work. It worked admirably. Amy's pleasure consisted chiefly in the discovery that Parliamentary dinners removed her from competition, and concentrated male attention upon herself. The balls and receptions had been a trial to her mother, but to her they had been a source of immeasurable bitterness. No humane person, contemplating the position of Miss Amy Chippering in her mother's drawing-room, not surrounded but in proximity to a dozen or so of the very best possible specimens of feminine beauty, receiving attention from a corresponding number of smart men, could have failed to pity her solitary condition. The bitterness of her feelings was aggravated by the knowledge that, while her "Pa" had designed the assemblage expressly for her gratification and advancement, its sweets were stolen by the daughters of others.

The Parliamentary dinner-parties were therefore as balm to her wounded spirit. She dyed her eyebrows and her hair, and smiled once more. Her capacity for smiling was prodigious, but no wonder, for she had an excellent row of teeth, and when the faded drab of her hair and eyebrows were brought up to a rich brown not inconsistent with her complexion, she was quite presentable.

Chippering, in accordance with his ordinary business processes, left the arrangement of his dinner-parties to an im-

pecunious and amiable Irish Peer, the Viscount Portaully, whose opinion on such matters was universally respected in the House. The Viscount Portaully, in fact, became one of the Chippering young men, and was put in charge of the entertainment department, in consideration, by tacit consent, of his always including himself among the entertained. He was over fifty, had very fine whiskers, and had fought in the Crimea for his country. He was loud in his praises of Amy, and regarded those expressions of admiration as part of the contract. He swore he would have married her himself if it hadn't been for the existence of a young lady, who, although she had committed bigamy three deep so far as intent was concerned, was yet, through the eccentricities of the law, not only the lawful wife of the Viscount, but could not be separated from him until death intervened in place of the Queen's Proctor.

Geoffrey Delfoy had been elected to this Parliament for a manufacturing constituency, and in due time he was selected by the Viscount as eligible for the Chippering dinner-party. His father had been defeated. The majority of two had become a minority of one hundred and seven; the mortgagee of the Luckross estate had foreclosed, and the Delfoys were at Aix. Geoffrey as yet had not complied with the conditions of the bargain struck at Nice, by going into the City, or anywhere else, to renovate the fortunes of the Delfoys, and had maintained the traditions of the family only by continuing to forestall its revenues.

Amy was charmed with Colonel Delfoy, so elegant, so interesting, so engaging, she told the Viscount.

"Oh, Colonel Delfoy, will you belong to our Society?" she asked, with all her teeth on view. "You would be *so* useful with your *great* experience."

She languished airily, with her head on one side, her forehead creased, and her whole manner betokening interrogation of the acute order.

Geoffrey assayed the two hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling, and remarked to himself that the dross was alarming in quantity, and would prove desperately hard to neutralise.

He would not have objected to the freckles or the form, but the teeth counted for very little beside the manner. Still, the manner had its qualities, not for grace or charm, but for opportunity. Geoffrey thought so frivolous a mind would be amenable to blandishments of the more frivolous order, for it must be remembered that he had entered the house with full knowledge of the label on the goods.

"What Society is that, Miss Chippering?" he asked in his most agreeable manner. "Something generally interesting?"

"Oh, *most* interesting. Is it not, Viscount? 'The Unusual Morality Association,' Colonel," she answered, regarding him with a look of satisfaction, as if she anticipated complete surrender on his part.

"What are its objects?" asked Geoffrey, bowing.

"Why, of course, Colonel, to make people unusually moral, especially in the East End."

"That's very good of you," said Geoffrey; "but I'm afraid I cannot assist, I'm at present so absorbed."

"Oh dear, Colonel, you are absorbed," she exclaimed, with a languishing air. "How delightful it is to feel absorbed. I do so like to feel absorbed. It's entrancing," she exclaimed, whisking her fan in the air and making as though she would fly in pursuit of the various ethereal emotions suggested by the condition of being absorbed.

They went down to dinner. The Earl of Feeldmore, a young peer of benevolent impulses and weak judgment, took down the lady of the house, while Chippering and the Viscount conducted a new and prominent member named Bowdler, who had carried an agricultural constituency in the face of the landed interest because he had been a collier and was a trades' union leader. He was a high-shouldered, bull-necked man, with a stern brow, black shaggy eyebrows, piercing eyes, and a hard, firm mouth. The Viscount was engaged in an attempt to tame him for the benefit of his party, and Bowdler was not averse to the treatment so far as the Chippering dinner-table was concerned, especially as no conditions were attached to his acceptance of courteous hospitality.

Geoffrey sat between the mother and the daughter, with the Earl opposite, and they had not advanced very far with the dinner when Amy began again about her Society, said the Earl was president, and that the Colonel must join as "a vice-president or a committee-man, or something"; it would be "so nice," she said.

Geoffrey looked into his plate for a moment or two, as if in search of an idea, and then, turning to his importunate neighbour, asked:

"What could I possibly do, Miss Chippering, to aid your Society? Nothing, I fear."

"Oh, yes, Colonel, you could do lots. You could get subscriptions."

The Colonel frowned.

"Perhaps I could," he said. "But I could do that without being on the committee. How much do you want?"

"Ten thousand pounds," said Miss Chippering, as if she were asking for a box of chocolates.

"And our friend Feeldmore is your president?"

"Yes."

"When would you like to have this ten thousand pounds?"

"Oh, as soon as possible, for there's a lot of midnight shelters to build, are there not, Mr. President?"

The Earl smiled feebly, and said there was a great deal to do with the money.

"I suppose you'll give me three months to pull it in for you—eh?" asked Geoffrey, with a complacent smile.

"Oh, yes, and longer," said Amy, "if you begin at once with some of it."

"I think it can be done in three months," said Geoffrey, meditating over some *vol au vent*. "In three months," he repeated, "upon conditions."

The excitable Amy clapped her hands, called upon "Pa" to say it was delightful, remonstrated with "Ma" for not thanking the Colonel for his generosity, and asked the Earl whether it wouldn't be ever so much better than a bazaar, all of which questions were appropriately answered with such reservation by the elder and more experienced member of the company as knowledge of the Colonel's financial relations naturally provoked. Indeed, no one at the table but Amy regarded Geoffrey's observations as anything but a joke.

"And what are your conditions, my boy?" the Viscount inquired, in the hope of some amusement.

"Very simple," said Geoffrey. "I should want some of Feeldmore's notepaper, and authority for a man I know to write some letters in Feeldmore's name."

"Yes, yes," said Amy, "that you can have," though if she had seen the Earl's face she would have been somewhat doubtful on the subject.

"And what else, my boy?" asked the Viscount, with a humorous twinkle of the eye.

"Nothing," said Geoffrey.

"You'll not get the money," said Chippering, whose interest was suddenly awakened by the daring proposal.

"I will, and I bet you an even thousand I do," said Geoffrey, whose eye gleamed and whose nature seemed fired with an unnatural enthusiasm. His aspect sobered the volatile Amy, and she looked on as if the game had gone beyond her powers. She felt as if she had fired a train of gunpowder.

This was Bowdler's opportunity: the hard-headed, practical collier, who had rammed trucks of coal along the pit rails with his head, and had become a leader of men because he had rammed the trucks with energy and determination.

"Tell us your plan, Colonel," said Bowdler.

"Is it a bet?" asked Geoffrey.

"Yes," said Chippering, who thought the risk worth running, it was so very small.

"Then I'll tell you, but mind if the conditions are not complied with, and I don't get the opportunity, the bet is off."

Chippering nodded assent, and the Colonel said with emphasis:

"I'll get you ten thousand pounds in three months for this or any other Society of a fairly taking object if Feeldmore will give me some of his notepaper and the authority to write in his name. Will he do it?"

Amy did not say "Yes" this time. The energy developing was much beyond her, and she waited for the Earl, who by this time presented a very miserable appearance.

"I should see the letters," said he.

"No," said Geoffrey, "you will receive the answers and the cheques, and you may stop at any time if you don't like the way the thing runs—only, in that event the bet is off," he added, nodding to Chippering.

"But a fellow ought to know what letters another fellow is writing for him, eh? Shouldn't he, now, eh?" pleaded the Earl.

"There's no necessity," said Geoffrey blandly. "If you tell your Secretary to write a note asking for a subscription, you don't read the note, do you?"

"No," said the Earl; "but that's different, you know. He writes in his own name."

"And that's why the subscriptions don't come in," said Geoffrey.

"But why don't you write in your name?" asked Feeldmore.

"Because I'm not an Earl and the president," said Geoffrey, and then turning to Amy he added in a lower and sympathetic tone: "I'm afraid your president is not interested in your Society."

The Earl repudiated this suggestion, said he was very much interested, but he continued plaintively to repeat that it would be very singular to be writing letters to people without knowing it.

"What security would the Earl have," asked Chippering "that the money would all go to the Society?"

"The security that he would receive it himself at Charling Court, his own place. What more could he want? The whole point of my scheme is that Feeldmore applies for the subscriptions, and receives the answers, and sends the cheques with the letters to the secretary, who banks the cheques and sends the letters and official receipts to me. Feeldmore, naturally being cautious, encloses these receipts to his correspondents with a note of thanks, or rather, my man does so for him. I bind myself to take care of the president."

"Then why can't the Earl's private secretary do it?" asked Chippering.

"Because he doesn't know whom to address, nor how to address them," said Geoffrey. "The writing of letters for subscriptions is an art. Feeldmore could not do it, nor could his secretary. I suppose, Feeldmore, you could not name ten people outside your own acquaintance that you know would bleed if you wrote them a note."

Feeldmore shook his head, assenting helplessly.

"Then let me tell you," said Geoffrey aggressively, "that my man has got an index of every benevolently disposed person in the kingdom, with a record against his name of the kind of charity he is disposed to, the time of year he subscribes, and the amount he is likely to give if he is properly tickled. It is on this information that the letters are written, and I say I'll get you your ten thousand in three months. Is it to be done?"

Feeldmore's misery increased. He said he thought he ought to ask his solicitor.

"I shall be sorry, Miss Chippering, for your sake," said Geoffrey, regarding her with a sympathetic look, "if Lord Feeldmore asks his solicitor's opinion. There will be no ten thousand

in that case. There are certain things solicitors should not be asked. A solicitor is bound to give a mechanically safe opinion. If your president cannot allow me to use his name to collect subscriptions for you, then morality must remain where it is."

Geoffrey went on eating his dinner, and all eyes turned to the unhappy Feeldmore, who in his wretchedness succumbed.

"Of course, Colonel, if you put it in that way," said he, "it makes a difference, and of course you'll be responsible."

"Obviously," exclaimed Geoffrey, "I take the entire responsibility."

So it was arranged, and the Earl, after having the whole process again explained to him, without his understanding it in the least, promised to write two letters, one to his stationer, authorising a supply of his usual notepaper to the demand of the bearer, and the other authorising Colonel Delfoy, M.P., to have letters written in his name soliciting subscriptions for the Unusual Morality Society. Moreover, he wrote them.

These formalities were completed in the drawing-room, where Miss Chippering, having recovered from the restraint of the dinner-table, approached Geoffrey with her accustomed air of archness and frivolity, and tapping him on the arm with her fan, said: "You *are* clever, awfully clever!" And she turned up her eyes and showed her teeth, and gave expression in her own particular way to her appreciation of the latest possible admirer of her varied charms. She then relapsed into her customary state of languor, and assumed her favourite *rôle* of dreamy enthusiasm. She, gradually working her way round from philanthropy and benevolence generally to the Society for Preventing Cruelty to Animals, then became plaintive on the subject of cats, and their cries of anguish in the still night, and finally dashed at Delfoy with something thoroughly in her own way.

"Animal life is very troublesome, don't you think so, Colonel?" she asked.

"Yes, yes," said Geoffrey dreamily.

"Very troublesome, and very inconvenient, Colonel, don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes."

"Oh, always, I think. Animal life moves about, you know, Colonel, and that involves a great deal, Colonel."

"Yes, yes," said Geoffrey, "a great deal."

A very great deal," she continued. "I'm so glad, Colonel

you're philosophical; it's so nice. Wouldn't you like to be a vegetable?"

"Well, no, I haven't thought that out."

"Oh, you should think it out, Colonel. Vegetables have repose. So much better than animals, always moving about and restless. How nice it would be to be a rose, for instance."

"Prickly," said Geoffrey. "I should prefer to be a cabbage —a summer cabbage."

"Oh, no, Colonel, they boil cabbages, and cabbage water is very nasty," remarked Amy, recalling her early experiences in the modest Chippering kitchen. "Ah, Colonel, you're laughing at me. I'm afraid you're not philosophical, but you're *very* clever. Poor Earl, how you frightened him; but you must get the ten thousand or I'll never forgive you."

That same night Geoffrey Delfoy wrote a note to W. Shout, Esq., of Dane's Inn.

'DEAR SHOUT,—Come round to-morrow early. Good business; and on the road leave the order for notepaper as per the enclosed from the Earl of Feeldmore. I have another for the handwriting, but copy this,—Yours, G. D."

CHAPTER XIV.

UNUSUAL MORALITY.

MR. WILLIAM SHOUT was busy. He had been busy for three months in the interest of the Unusual Morality Association, and was in a state of wild excitement at the success of what he called working the *sic vos non vobis indices*. This is the language in which he described the foundation of the systematised begging letter operation arranged for by Geoffrey Delfoy with the co-operation of the Earl of Feeldmore. He called it "indices," because he had in his possession a number of books, prepared with enormous labour by an old friend of his, then dead, whom he irreverently styled the old "Duster," containing the names of all the people discoverable who were philanthropically disposed, alphabetically indexed and numbered.

Having thus labelled them, like so many barrels of generous liquor only waiting to be tapped to rejoice the heart of man, they were indexed in other books under subjects. The number of those who had a fancy for alleviating physical distress were recorded under the various designations of hospitals, almshouses, shelters, blind, cripples, incurables, occasional grants, annuals; those who were controlled in their selection by piety were recorded under missions, church building, lay service, clerical stipend, and sundry other distinctive headings. Then, again, another index was devoted to the times of giving, and all those benevolent people who set apart a tenth, say at the quarter-days, were here set down to be pounced upon at the very time they had their purses filled and their imaginations revelling in the prospect of doing somebody a good turn. Mr. Shout called them *sic vos non vobis indices* because his old friend had grown the sheep and he was shearing them.

The master stroke of the system was the way in which the Earl of Feeldmore, in the person of Mr. William Shout and his myrmidons, followed up these benevolently disposed persons, recorded their excuses, and reminded them a little later that

their time had come, and that he would now take no denial. Who, among the benevolently disposed, could resist the importunity of a noble Earl in the interest of Unusual Morality?

If the Earl had only seen his letters, what a wonderfully high opinion he would have had of himself. The delicate way in which he alluded to the disposition of his correspondent, the special character of the work his correspondent favoured, the intimate acquaintance the Earl seemed to have of the idiosyncracies in alms-giving of all those whom he applied to, and the easy way in which he showed how the Unusual Morality Association, in some of its departments of well-doing, exactly coincided with the object most applauded by the particular correspondent he addressed would have filled him with admiration as it did the donors with gratitude at being asked by a noble Earl to do the very thing their hearts inclined to.

The key to this admirable adaptation of means to an end was centered in the condition imposed by Geoffrey Delfoy in the interest of Shout that, apart from a trifling consideration of a commission of twenty-five per cent. of the moneys collected, all letters, whether of refusal or compliance, should be transmitted to him. In every instance the spirit of these letters was recorded on the page devoted to the donor in question, where every transaction with him had been noted from the very first, long before the indexes had come into Shout's hands, and it was in this way the Earl of Feeldmore was able to address his correspondents with so much knowledge and appreciation.

What a curious revulsion of feeling would have occurred both to the Earl and his correspondent if they could have seen Mr. William Shout at work, assisted by a short, stout, mulberry-nosed gentleman of about sixty, whom Shout referred to as the Bishop. He had been educated at Cambridge for the Church, but had never been ordained, so it was natural and proper Mr. Shout should call him "The Bishop" in derision. His name was Purley, and on the particular afternoon in question he was taking down the names of sundry obstinate philanthropists, at whom, in Mr. Shout's language, the Earl was going to have "another shy."

Purley was a capital writer, of whose performances the Earl would have had no cause to be ashamed. He not only wrote letters of a most insinuating and persuasive character, but in a handwriting sufficiently illegible, without being either slovenly

or incomprehensible, as to pass muster for the most aristocratic correspondent in the world. Purley did only special letters, and he was writing the addresses from Shout's dictation of the several cases to be dealt with, and making notes of the special points in each. They sat at a round table, and Purley, being near-sighted, had his head bent over his work, and muttered as he wrote: "Religious, declined soup kitchen because parson low church."

"What's the next?"

"A lady," said Shout, "who told you a month ago she'd think about it. Letter number two thousand four hundred and seventy-two. She's a commiserating soul, and good for a hundred, if properly handled. Handle her properly, my bishop."

There was a feeble knock at the door at this point, and a little old woman wearing a white apron and a large bonnet appeared. She didn't speak, but nodded her head backwards mysteriously and retired. It was Mrs. Fludge the laundress, who, in the course of this great rush of prosperity and business, was almost constantly in attendance. Shout understood the signal, and went outside to find Geoffrey Delfoy in the passage, looking rather wild, as if his mind were not quite at rest. They went into the bedroom, and Delfoy, sitting down on the iron bedstead, drew a large bundle of letters from his pocket and handed them to Shout, with a gloomy scowl that caused his friend the gravest apprehension.

"Whom have you inside?" asked Geoffrey, with an inclination of his head in the direction of the sitting-room.

"Only the Bishop," said Shout. "I'll go and start him home. He's got enough to go on with."

Shout disappeared to carry out this intention, and during his absence Delfoy sat with his head bowed down and his hands clasped between his knees, muttering anathemas. Presently he yawned, uttered a monosyllabic imprecation in common use, and shook himself.

"Come on, my brick," cried Shout, "the coast's clear." And then turning to the kitchen, as he let Geoffrey Delfoy, M.P., find his way to the sitting-room, he enjoined Mrs. Fludge to be sure to have a good stock of kippers, with streaky bacon, new laid eggs, and fresh butter in the pantry before she left for the night. "Drink is all very well," said he apologetically to Delfoy, on joining him, "but I'm not a snipe, and man cannot live by suction alone; in fact, the example of the snipe is a

bad one. Mrs. Fludge prefers drink, and she thinks I do, but I object to be left alone with one kipper, and no butter. It's injurious. It leads to dissipation."

"Yes," said Geoffrey; "but at the same time I should like a little brandy now. I'm in a bad way, and want pulling together."

"You look it," said Shout, who produced the brandy with alacrity; "but why in the name of all that's sacred you should be in a bad way it would puzzle the Archangel Gabriel to say."

"I've had nothing but bad luck all the year," said Geoffrey fiercely—"a bad Derby, a bad Ascot, a bad Doncaster. I've lost steadily all through. I haven't won a single bet of any consequence, and I've just had three days and three nights of whist, and lost steadily all through that also—I haven't had a single hand worth talking about the whole time."

"Indeed," said Shout, "and what's the moral?"

"The Devil."

"Certainly," said Shout.

"But I haven't come here to talk about myself," said Delfoy, "but about business. Here's the last batch of letters and receipts for remittances," he added putting them on the table, but keeping his hand upon them as he continued. "This makes a total of ten thousand and fourteen pounds; and I want you to close up as quick as you can, for fear you overdo it."

"Oh," said Shout, looking at his friend very keenly. "Anything else?"

"Yes," said Delfoy, producing his pocket-book. "Here's ten hundred-pound notes for your share of the commission, and you'll hardly believe it, but that hound of a secretary was actually beginning to talk about the largeness of the sum, and that he must see his committee about it."

"You don't say so," remarked Shout, gathering up the notes with a hand trembling with excitement, "an unconscionable villain.'

"Of course there's no denying that twenty-five per cent. is a full commission for collecting subscriptions—quite a full commission—and when it comes to odd guineas and half-sovereigns here and there it's little enough, and no doubt twenty-five hundred pounds is a large sum to pay out as commission, but so is ten thousand to drag in. I put it to the rascal—the dishonourable cad—that he had no conception of the costliness of the organisation you, my friend, had to keep

up. I explained to him that your intelligence department cost you five thousand a year, and then I told him that if he didn't give me the money to enable me to discharge my undertaking with you I would go to Feeldmore and get him dismissed."

"And then he cashed up?"

"Yes, then he cashed up, and you'd better stop tapping your mine of snobbery for the present and give it a rest. And now, my dear Shout, I must make a painful confession. I'm stone broke, and I want you to lend me one of those notes to put me as far as Nice, where there's a little bet I propose to take up—the one solitary bit of luck I've had this year."

"Certainly," said Shout. "One's enough, eh?"

"Yes, one's enough. Very absurd my borrowing this of you, but what could I do otherwise? Every penny of my ready money's gone, and I brought this round for fear I should encroach on it."

As he said this he reclined on an old-fashioned double-ended sofa, and rested his head on a pile of newspapers covered by an old fur coat. Having folded up the note and put it in his pocket he seemed more at ease, and began lighting a cigarette.

"I shouldn't have grumbled if you had encroached on it, old man, but you *are* a fellow for running through money." Shout looked at his friend as he said this, with the eye of a connoisseur. "Nothing seems to stop you."

"Nothing will, but I'm going to turn over the customary new leaf. I'm going to begin to make money. Dice and cards are all very well for amusement, but they're devilish uncertain, unless you mark 'em or load 'em."

"Cheating's dangerous," remarked the moral Shout, with a moral shake of the head. "It's not regarded exactly with approval. It's not quite recognised as high-toned, you know."

"Who talks of cheating?" said Geoffrey. "You don't take me for a fool, do you? I say, I'm going to enter upon an entirely new course. I propose to handle one or two little matters of business shortly that will turn me in a lot of money, and the backs of the cards in the game will all be marked. They always are in commerce as far as I can make out, and the winner is the man who marks most cards in the pack."

There was a tap at the door, and Mrs. Fludge introduced her head and one hand, as if she were holding the door closed

against an importunate crowd behind her. Thus stationed she announced:

"The girl Vickers."

Geoffrey took advantage of the digression to make an end of his visit. Having put on his hat and coat, he said, tapping the pocket where he presumed Shout had put the notes:

"Country tour, I suppose, eh? Booking dates already, eh? Enormous fortune to start with, eh? Dead certainty to begin with, eh? And dead broke to finish with, eh?"

He emphasised each question with a tap and a grin, and brought himself into quite a good humour by contemplating the development of his friend's particular folly. Experience had taught him that his friend's sole ambition in life was to be a theatrical manager.

"No, upon my soul, old man, I've got a wonderful piece," expostulated Shout.

"No doubt, no doubt. They are always wonderful pieces before the curtain goes up. But never mind me. Go ahead. I'm not a pattern of prudence. One way's as good as another, for the coin *will* go. It always does, my friend, and I'm afraid we're bad men of business."

"But the title of the piece alone will draw, and I play the villain myself," said Shout, expostulating.

"Quite right, Shout, quite right. Always play the villain. He's much more interesting than the painfully correct hero, even if he does come to grief; but don't be too realistic, and whatever you do don't play a parson," with which pleasantry, and an extra dig in the neighbourhood of Shout's waistcoat pocket, Geoffrey Delfoy went his way, shaking his head and repeating his determination to make a new move of surprising excellence and unquestionable merit. He was in a reforming humour, and thought about his distressful condition all the way through the Strand, past the National Gallery, and away up Waterloo Place to the Albany.

He let himself in, according to custom, with his latch-key, and entering his room, sat down in his easy-chair with the same air of listless dejection that had characterised his manner throughout the day.

His man Dubley appeared without being summoned, and stood within the door ready for action. He was a perfectly straight little man, with a large head, and clothed himself in very close-fitting garments. He stood with his arms uplifted, as indicating his readiness to do something in the way of ser-

vice; and with his big head slightly on one side (as if he would catch the faintest whisper of command) he had the appearance of being a wooden man out of a toy shop worked by springs. He was a legacy from his brother George, and had a sort of vested interest in the family, having descended from a long line of Dubleys, whose connection with the Delfoys, in the various capacities of gamekeepers, lodgekeepers, and gardeners, had continued during many generations, and had originated at some period of antiquity so remote that history contained no record of it.

This particular Dubley was the last of his race, and although not realising the popular conception of an old and trusted servant, his devotion to his master knew no bounds, and his sense of responsibility was equal to that of a member of the Cabinet at least. He was also a moral philosopher of the first order.

"Dubley, I'm very tired," said Geoffrey, in tones which indicated a sense of relief in addressing a sympathetic ear.

"Yes, sir. Perhaps a little nourishment would be advisable, sir, if I might suggest it," said Dubley.

"A little brandy, Dubley."

"And soda, sir," said Dubley, who forthwith administered the compound.

"I'm very tired indeed, Dubley," said Geoffrey, after drinking two-thirds of the contents of the tumbler.

"Perhaps the haction of the 'art is a little low, sir, and wants stimulating."

"It wants rest, Dubley."

"Probably, sir," said Dubley, with alacrity. "The legislature, sir, is a more severer tax than people imagines, sir; and it's within my experience, sir, as a man should 'old 'isself in."

Geoffrey nodded approvingly, which encouraged Dubley to proceed:

"The henergies, sir, mustn't be worked hextra 'ard when the action of the 'art is low."

"Quite right, Dubley," said Geoffrey, "and I'm very low now—very low. I go to Nice to-morrow, and to-night I'll dine off a plain mutton chop and go to bed at nine-thirty."

"Very good, sir," said Dubley, who reflected deeply on the state of affairs during the process of preparation, and remarked with concern upon the continued depression of his master. His very presence within fifty miles of Charing Cross during

the autumn months was a social irregularity, and quite sufficient to cause Dubley concern, without the knowledge of all the gloomy recriminations then passing through Delfoy's brain.

To be sitting there deploring his follies, and building future successes upon angry resolutions, with a borrowed hundred-pound note as his sole available capital, was a curious and yet not unprecedented position for the representative of the Delfoys. What really troubled Delfoy, however, was the incomprehensible fact that he invariably did absurd things with his money immediately after making the most solemn promises to himself that in the particular instance under consideration he would behave prudently. The resolutions he made on this occasion, however, were to be as curbs of steel upon his thoughts and actions; and he would become a very bondsman to wise resolutions.

He drank a bottle of champagne with his mutton chop, and thought it did him good. He became more philosophical and argumentative after his dinner, and began lecturing himself as if he were somebody else to whom he felt impelled to give some sound advice.

"You see," said he, "we shall all go to the devil if we don't start on a new tack. We've positively nothing left to raise any money on. I'm afraid the old man is not prudent."

Having made this sage reflection, he went on smoking; and now and then nodded his head at the fireplace as some unusually brilliant reflection passed through his mind. "Yes, yes," he said approvingly, as he finished the cigarette and flung it into the fire. "Yes, I'll do it. I cannot say that it will be agreeable, but it's the only course; and the sooner it's done the better. There must be no delay."

The idea, whatever it was, appeared to give him comfort. He smiled, walked round the room, took a liqueur of brandy, and resumed his seat with the same absorbed air. He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, stretched his feet out on the fender, and with his head bent forward, moodily contemplated the dancing flames.

"It's not pleasant, but it's the fact," said Geoffrey Delfoy the moralist to Geoffrey Delfoy the delinquent. "Things are not going on as they should, and there must be a change. People say I'm clever—some of them say 'Damned clever,' but, in my opinion, cleverness does not consist in making a mess of things and coming to grief. Success is the proof of cleverness."

He stopped for a time, and nodded at the fire as if to assure it that its inspirations were altogether satisfactory to him.

"Yes, I must put my theories into practice," he continued. "I've plenty of them, and they're all sound. But I wish I hadn't thrown away that fifteen hundred pound. It would have been useful."

This self-evident proposition also gave him satisfaction. He rose up and poured out another glass of brandy, as a reward for candour and logical reflection. Then, as he held the brandy in his hand, half-way to his lips, he shook his head, hesitated, and finally poured the brandy back into the bottle. He then called Dubley and settled the programme for the morrow.

Reflecting on his scanty supplies he resolved to go without Dubley, and turned over in his mind various modes by which he could convey his desire without awakening in Dubley a suspicion of the real cause.

"Dubley," said he, "you haven't had a holiday for a long time. I shall be away about a fortnight, and I think I can do without you."

"Indeed, sir!" said Dubley in amazement. He had never contemplated the possibility of any circumstances arising in which his attendance could be dispensed with.

"Yes," said Delfoy, "I shall take very few things. Go and see your friends, Dubley, and be back here by Monday week."

"I should have great pleasure in visiting my friends, sir, if you will allow me to say so," said Dubley, smiling as the unusual horizon of a holiday broke upon his view; "but I should feel unhappy, sir, if you found cause to regret my absence, sir."

"No, no, Dubley," said Delfoy moodily, "take your holiday."

The want of the rejected glass of brandy had revived Delfoy's gloom. He frowned and fidgeted as he thought of it. Surely he was weak to deny himself so moderate a stimulant at a season of unusual depression. Dubley observed the gloom that weighed upon his master, and thought he would enliven him with a little more philosophy. He watched for an opportunity, and, like a great many other moral philosophers and self-constituted teachers of the human race, he was not too nice either about the appropriateness of his remark to the occasion or as to the necessity for delivering himself, beyond the fact that, having gone through the labour of creating sundry

grave reflections, he was unable to resist their demand for utterance.

"Life, sir, is an extraordinary thing, sir," said Dubley, with his hands folded, and looking hard at Geoffrey as if the proposition he set forth had been arrived at after much serious thought, as indeed it was the result of quite two hours' meditation.

"Yes, Dubley, it is," said his master, "and occasionally a very disagreeable thing—very."

"Yes, sir," pursued Dubley, with confidence, "life, sir, is an affair of hangles, and what we've got to do, sir, is to rub 'em down."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GIRL VICKERS.

"THERE," said the girl of the name of Vickers, who marked the departure of Geoffrey Delfoy, M.P., before stating her business to Mr. William Shout. "There's sixty-two 'Dear Sirs' and thirty 'Dear Madams,' and father says he won't write no more without the money."

"And he sha'n't, Miss Laura, as you say. He sha'n't write no more without the money," said Mr. Shout, with a profound bow, as he ushered the girl into the sitting-room. "Your father, Miss Laura—charming Miss Laura, shall have his money. He *shall* have it," repeated Mr. Shout, with decision, as if someone were desirous of preventing the just discharge of this special obligation to the paternal Vickers. "He shall *have* it," he again repeated, with a varied emphasis, as he looked about in drawers and portfolios, searching among books, records, and newspapers, among old clothes, on the sofa, and under the tea-tray on the table, and among stacks of dusty papers on the mantelpiece, mixed with old pipes and a variety of tobacco pots that were never used because Mr. Shout said "the exchequer never ran to it." Shout's sitting-room was a wonderful combination, in any circumstances, but when he was busy it was a sort of old clothes warehouse, a second-hand bookshop and eating-house and a lawyer's copying-room, all in one, and that very small.

As he plunged in the drawers and dived under the heaps of papers, and searched in the pockets of the old clothes he always brought himself up, with his eye on the girl, and favoured her with a wink, or some other grimace indicative of appreciation. "The maiden's cheek is rosy," thought Mr Shout, "and' her lips are ripe for amorous salutation; I must dissemble.' He finally drew himself up, and with his hands in his pockets gazed upon the girl as if in deep thought.

"What's yer fake?" asked the girl, with contempt.

"The bill, Laura, the bill."

"There ain't no bill. It's twenty-four and six I want, and yer may jest as well 'and up."

She spoke with a show of disgust at what she conceived to be Mr. Shout's pretence. She was one of those curious productions of our modern civilisation and freedom, the London girl, who, at the age of sixteen, was quite at home anywhere and in any company, provided it was neither refined nor modest. She was strong and healthy, and was endowed with a natural vigour capable of thriving in a London bye-street. She wore high-heeled shoes, and stockings that had never been near a darning-needle, a draggled skirt of blue, and a long jacket of imitation Astrachan, much worn, and drawn out of shape by its own weight. Her hair hung down her back in a large plait, evidently three days old, and on her head was a broad-brimmed hat of faded purple velvet, decorated with a spray of roses that had evidently seen a good deal of weather and had quite given up trying to look gay.

Shout ceased pretending, upon this remonstrance, drew some money out of his pocket, and counted out the twenty-four and sixpence.

"There, Laura," said he, "you won't lose it."

"Not me!"

"And you won't come and ask for it again, because we don't pay twice in this establishment."

"No fears," said the girl, gathering up the coin that had purchased a substitute for the penmanship of the Earl of Feeldmore. "And father says I was to ask if you wanted any more."

"No more at present, Laura," said Shout. "Tell your father his Lordship is very much obliged to him, very much obliged."

"All right," said the girl, and away she went to console her father with the twenty-four and sixpence and the compliments of his Lordship, which, like the letter writing, were all done by proxy.

It was a gloomy day—the beginning of the winter come a little before its time, with a tendency to fog, and consequent darkness. The girl made her way through Wych Street and Drury Lane to Bow Street in a leisurely unconcerned manner, but very much on the alert, as is the wont of girls bred in the centre of the city, where the life of the young is an affair of gibes and jostling, a matter of dodging and warding off, a sort of patchwork of squalor and plenty, according as the parental

scramble for the wherewithal has been fruitful or the reverse. She found her way through Covent Garden to Bow Street where she was gratified by seeing the removal of a distinguished prisoner from the Police Court to the prison van, and then across Long Acre, where she was excited by the exhilarating spectacle of a fire-engine at full gallop, with all the customary accompaniment of shouting and neck-stretching, and then down Endell Street, a nondescript thoroughfare that has been undergoing a transformation throughout all time within the memory of living man, and seems never to become anything more than a thing of hope and promise. Even in these later days it represents a jagged and inconsistent appearance. The first efforts at improvement have grown old and discoloured, and the latest products of a reforming tendency add to the incongruous result.

On this particular afternoon when the girl Vickers emerged from Endell Street into the large irregular area known as Broad Street, that spreads itself in various directions towards Oxford Street, the northern part of the thoroughfare and its surroundings were characterised by numerous alleys, within which were congregated much that was squalid and criminal, and many whose ambitions never rose beyond the hope of avoiding the penalties of crime and the brutality of domestic correction. From these alleys emerged slatternly women or slouching men, according to the hour of the day; and at odd times throngs of boys, ranging from sixteen to one-and-twenty years of age, grouped themselves about the pavement, a boisterous, roistering, jostling, and marauding gang, who varied the pastime of terrorising over the passers-by with shouting and blaspheming among themselves.

The purple velvet hat of Laura Vickers became a natural centre of attraction to such a gang, disporting itself on the broad pavement in front of Bloomsbury Chapel; and the twenty-four and sixpence designed to cheer the heart of the paternal Vickers was in danger. One of the fellows who had been dancing a double shuffle on the pavement, with his hands in his pockets, hailed her by the name of "Mary," and asked for a lock of her hair. Another intercepted her, as she made for the roadway, with the exclamation "Would yer?" A third embraced her in the rear, and the rest were closing around, when suddenly, on the signal of a hoarse and thoroughly discordant imitation of the cry of a mountaineer, which resolved itself into the syllables "Too-ral-y-ity," the whole gang dispersed in the direction of Oxford Street, and in a moment each

individual had the appearance of being wholly unconnected with his neighbour, and bent on a separate errand of no consequence to anybody, for while some slouched with their hands in their pockets, others frisked or ambled, and others again whistled the latest air of the streets with well-simulated abstraction; but each and all kept well within view of a stationary figure of the same breed as themselves on the other side of Oxford Street and at the end of one of the streets running northwards.

With similar suddenness to the last signal a cry of "What cheer, Maria!" came down the street, and instantly the whole gang began converging to a common point, where a lady and two little girls were making their way along the pavement unconscious of the approaching horde. The next moment they were surrounded, as the lady cried, "Ethel, keep close!" and a little girl of about seven, with large dark eyes and a mass of tangled dark hair, buried her face in her mother's skirts, while on the other side, a fair girl, a couple of years older, whom the mother called "Dora," glared defiance at a foul-smelling ruffian, who forced his hands in between the mother and child, and with a deftness and rapidity that announced long practice and proficiency, discovered the exact position of her purse. Defiance and resistance in such a case were idle. The eight vigorous, brutal, and agile young fellows pressed upon these three weakly ones with a determined purpose, and executed their manœuvres with silent persistency. So well were they organised that no one in the distance, either up the street or down, could have seen that anything was afoot beyond the ordinary evolutions of street loafers, for the movements of the three experts in felony were completely covered by the simulation of the ordinary loafers' street antics on the part of the others.

It was a terrible moment for the three timid ones, for though the incident occurred in the heart of London, and close to a main thoroughfare, it was the season when the fewest people are in town and about the streets, and choice of the scene of enterprise was dictated by experience. But while it happens that bye-streets leading from main thoroughfares in London are frequently deserted during the day except by an occasional passenger, the intervals of desertion are short, and ruffianism must be quick to be successful. The sudden intrusion among the roughs, apparently from nowhere, of a gentleman wielding a walking-stick like a battleaxe, and with the agility of a harlequin, caused a diversion in favour of

The Rescue.

the timid ones; and the appearance of other travellers upon the horizon, in the neighbourhood of Bedford Square, accelerated a retreat, with the booty, however, consisting of a small purse containing a five-pound note and a few copper coins.

The sympathetic public, although it was quickly on the spot, and beat the tardy policeman by quite two minutes and a half, had seen nothing of the occurrence but its ending, and was therefore quite unable to do anything but gape at the three timid ones and the gentleman with a walking-stick going off in a four-wheeled cab to Torrington Square.

Very little occurred on the way home. The children were dumb with astonishment at the violence and rapidity of events; and the embarrassment of their mother was respected by their protector, so that beyond an assurance or two that all was well, and thankful recognition for deliverance, nothing was said. It was not until they were safe in the presence of Mrs. Littercan, and climbing up the narrow staircase to the first-floor sitting-room, that the tongues of the little girls were loosed concerning the marvellous adventure that had befallen them: and then imagination and dreams would fail to match the wild extravagance of their description of the brigands who had assaulted them, their fierce looks, their rough manners, and their horrid voices; all of which, to the minutest detail, they described to their brother Philip with increasing volubility, and innumerable exclamations of horror and amazement, that such a thing could happen so near at hand. Philip, who, with silent sympathy, caressed his mother, and questioned his sisters with grave deliberation, finally asked where was the gentleman with the wonderful stick.

This gave rise to quite a revulsion of feeling, and all was excitement to know what had become of him, when Mrs. Littercan, being appealed to, announced that he went away in the cab, saying he would call next day, and left his card. Upon it was inscribed: "Mr. Morris Heritage."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCERNING A GREAT DRAGON.

THERE was a great commotion that night in the back bedroom. The incident of the day had taken possession of the imaginations of the two little girls, and in the course of the evening it had been resolved to reduce it to pictorial representation. This was decided upon by seven o'clock, and by eight they were put to bed, full of great schemes associated with a box of colours and six sheets of cartridge paper; but there were differences of opinion as to the mode of treatment. Ethel, aged seven, was realistic, and had insisted upon the introduction of "mummer's umbrella" life size in the preliminary design modelled out with the dolls of the establishment, despite the absence of heads, arms, and other appendages. Theodora, commonly known as "Dora," aged nine, was imaginative and dictatorial. She was indeed the dominant spirit, presumed on her extra two years, and poor little Ethel, with her large dark eyes and magnificent growth of black hair, was always making suggestions so that Dora might trample on them and show how stupid she was.

"You see, Ethel," said Dora, under the bed-clothes, that the voices might not travel, "you don't understand anything about it."

"Yes," said Ethel, without raising any objection to so well-established a proposition.

"And you know, Ethel," continued Dora, the dictator, "we're not to be people at all, but birds. Mummer shall be a duck, and we shall be little ducks, just hatched and all fluffy."

"And yellow," assented Ethel.

"Why, of course, we shall be yellow. They're always yellow. But I don't think we should be ducks; we should be other birds with colours in them. I'll be a robin, and you should be a greenfinch."

"Yes," said Ethel, to show her desire to conciliate, "and mummer should be a goose."

"Oh, Ethel, mummer mustn't be a goose, she'd be offended."

"But a goose is bigger, Dora, and mummer must be bigger."

"Then she can be a duck. A duck's quite big enough, and has blue stripes. Now, that's settled, and then there's the men."

"Yes, the men," echoed Ethel, at great loss to reconcile eight or nine street loafers with the duck and robin arrangement, and she said so.

"But they're not to be men!" exclaimed Dora. "They're to be cats—tom cats—and one of them is to be a Manx cat, that one, you know, with his coat tails torn off."

"Oh, yes, that will be quite right," said Ethel; "but I don't think Manx cats really have no tails. They're chopped off by the sailors."

"That doesn't matter," said Dora. "We'll have three tabbies, and a white cat with a bushy tail, and the rest may be anything you like."

She added this last point in a testy manner, as if she did not want to be bothered by the cats any more; but Ethel was grateful for the concession, and treasured up the announcement that she was at liberty to determine on the colour and general character of at least five cats, and resolved there and then that two of them should be engaged in a private quarrel of their own, with arched backs and tails erect.

"And now," said Dora, with a sigh, "there's the gentleman. What a bother he is."

"Well, he's got a stick," said Ethel apologetically, "to drive the cats away."

"Really, Ethel, you tax my patience." This was a quotation from "mummer," and reduced Ethel to submission. "The gentleman's not to be a people any more than the others. He's to be a dragon, all red and green and blue, and with red fire breath."

"But with a walking-stick."

"Whoever heard of a dragon with a walking-stick? No, the walking-stick is to be a flash of lightning."

"Forked lightning," pleaded Ethel.

"Well, yes, forked lightning," said Dora, "coming out of a black cloud."

Then after a pause Dora sighed a prodigious sigh and said:

"Dear me, what a trouble it is to arrange a simple little thing like that!"

"Yes," said Ethel, with a sigh of her own, a little short, modest sigh; "but you know, Dora, you're so particular."

Dora conceded this, but said it was necessary to be particular, or nothing would ever come right; and having settled this, they agreed that they must coax "mummer" in the morning not to bother about the geography, but to let them commence the drawing early, so as to get it done before the gentleman came in the afternoon. This point was discussed at some length, and, having decided that geography was of no use to them, as they were not going to be sailors, they went to sleep, and dreamt of dragons and tom cats; but the realistic Ethel was much hampered in her dream by the presence of innumerable walking-sticks, flying about in all directions among the cats and the dragon.

"Mummer" was complacent next day, as she always was, and geography was cast to the four winds in favour of the grand allegorical work projected under the bed clothes the night before. Dora set to with a will, and Ethel assisted by looking on and admiring. That was her principal part, but spaces for her five cats were duly set out in pencilled squares, very much in the background. As a special favour there would be a corner reserved in the foreground for the two black ones with arched backs and tails erect; but all other concessions were rigorously denied.

There was no question but that the work was a great one. Ethel was in raptures with it, but Philip was sarcastic. He came home from school at four o'clock, and protested that the duck was a hen, with its ruffled feathers, only he had never seen a blue hen before, and he quite disapproved of the tabby on its hind legs, menacing the duck's nose with inordinately long talons. All admitted, however, that the dragon was a masterpiece. It was a most ferocious dragon, with a long scaly tail that meandered down the whole length of the paper, and would have meandered twice the distance if Dora had had more paper to work on. She was very proud of the tail, but Ethel was strongly impressed with the lightning, as she had been allowed to draw one fork while Dora went to wash her hands. The end of it all was that the picture was put aside at four o'clock, to be touched up later on, and the two

artists were marched away to have the paint washed off, and be generally made presentable in view of the expected visit.

There was tea provided, with an eighteen-penny cake on the glass dish, and the best tea service was set out, and the plated silver waiter was polished up to hand the tea on, and Ethel was to hand it. That was all settled according to established usage, for Dora objected to hand things, and on this occasion she objected to the interruption altogether, and desired to go on with the scales in the dragon's tail.

Heritage came exactly at five o'clock, as he had promised, looking very spruce, and very different from the fighting, ruffled prototype of the dragon of the day before, and evidently very much delighted at the prospect of making the acquaintance of the family group. He was about five or six-and-thirty at this time, and none of the sadness that from time to time overshadowed his face was apparent as he shook hands and expressed the conventional hope of good health and recovery from the shock of the day before. Muriel was very graceful in her manner, and smiled her gratitude both for the rescue and the visit; but Philip, who had been unusually quiet, standing at the table gravely and silently watching Heritage as he drank his tea, suddenly, as the visitor finished, stepped out to take his cup, and when he had carried it to the table, the boy turned round, and standing with his head thrown back, said, in quite a formal manner, but with clear enunciation:

"I think, sir, I ought to thank you myself for protecting my mother and sisters from those rough fellows."

This pleased Heritage very much, and he answered that perhaps some day the boy would have an opportunity of doing a similar service to some others.

"And I hope," answered Philip, "I shall be ready enough to do what is right."

He said it firmly, for he really meant it; but a tear came tumbling down his cheek, although his head was erect and his voice was firm. He was a boy of strong emotions, as well as high courage, and this expression of thanks had been preying on his mind all day as to how he should say it and when: but say it he knew he must, and he said it well. He struck right home to Heritage's sympathetic nature, and his mother blushed and trembled, as the incident passed, in a silent passion of love and fear and gratitude.

So the visit passed, and the picture of the dragon was never shown, which Ethel thought a shame; but Dora was superior,

with all the vanity of a great artist, to anything but the consciousness of achievement, and said she thought Mr. Heritage wore very queer-coloured trousers.

This was not the end of the acquaintanceship. Next day Heritage called to see Mrs. Littercan, and took the ground floor rooms, not for constant residence, he said, as he lived in the country, but for occasional use when he desired to stay a night in town. This gave opportunity for conversational inquiry about the widow upstairs, her habits and antecedents, and Mrs. Littercan's volubility was sufficiently abundant for all purposes.

Later, Heritage's City interest was used on behalf of Philip, who was very soon installed at the Charterhouse School, and presents of picture books and drawing materials were constantly making their appearance, for the dragon had, after all, been exhibited, with many apologies from Muriel and much amusement on the part of Heritage.

And knowledge of these incidents being current in the basement, Mrs. Littercan informed her Joe on one of the rare occasions when he was not "down the line," but smoking his long clay pipe by the kitchen fire, that she wouldn't wonder a bit, but on the contrary would think it more than likely as not, and that he was really a very handsome and fair-spoken gentleman, and she couldn't hope in the natur' of things to do better, but might on the contrary do much wuss, to which Littercan would reply briefly but oracularly:

"Mebbe."

CHAPTER XVII.

NICE AND OPALS.

THE Chipperings were at Nice, the vestibule of Monte Carlo, and the temporary domicile of those who like to have an address on the Riviera that does not actually comprehend the tables. Mr. Chippering disported himself in a broad-brimmed straw hat and white trousers, walked the gardens, smiling as if he were still receiving customers, and handed his daughter a chair with all the grace of former days, when handing chairs was the first duty of life, and the sure prelude, if done with finish, to making sales.

Amy Chippering, a mass of colours in violent contrast, all ends and pleats and varied extravagancies, accompanied her father, but Mrs. Chippering remained at home. The business of fashionable life was becoming a terror to her, and she sighed for the little back parlour behind Alfred's first shop, when he sold a row of pins with pleasure, and regarded cold mutton and pickles as a banquet. "Ma," in the opinion of Amy, was "*passé*." Ma's own opinion about herself was that she did not want to be worried.

The father and daughter got on very well together. Both were examples of the value of conceit and self-complacency in relation to the acquisition of pleasure. The father was contented in his success, by virtue of his egotism; the daughter found enjoyment through her ignorance. The sensations which cause pleasure, regarded as mechanical agents, are as complete in the case of the vain, misguided, and absolutely vulgar woman, laughed at and contemned on all sides, as in the most refined and sensitive natures. The difference lies in the fact that the grosser nature gets her gratifications more abundantly and cheaper than the more refined, whose field is necessarily more restricted.

The daughter flirted her parasol and smiled her sickly smile, inanely satisfied that she was perfectly lovely in feature as in toilette. The father put the ankle of one leg on the

knee of the other, threw his coat back with a waggish air, and smoked a cheroot as he leaned back in his chair the picture of rakish indifference to the serious affairs of life, such as brocades and Welsh flannel. His daughter looked upon him with admiration for a moment, but only for a moment. The smile turned to a frown, and in pettish tones she exclaimed:

"Oh! pa, I wish you wouldn't."

"Wouldn't what, my dear?" inquired the amiable parent.

"Why, that hat—it's horrible!"

"Oh, dear, no," responded Mr. Chippering; "a little eccentric perhaps, but not horrible. The British legislator is permitted a little eccentricity;" and accordingly the British legislator hugged his leg a little higher and smoked with increased determination to be comfortable.

"It's not *la mode*," exclaimed Amy, very much annoyed, and turned her eyes in the direction of the crowd that passed to and fro between the sitters and the band. Suddenly and with scarcely a moment's interlude, she exclaimed, far louder than was consistent with the manners of a young lady who had views about *la mode*: "Oh! pa, look!"

Pa looked, but could see nothing extraordinary either to delight or alarm. The people marched to and fro in cheerfulness and in gloom, as a pleasure, as a duty, as a novelty, as the victims of boredom and the very embodiment of ennui. The child of misfortune in a back alley playing with half a brick and three oyster shells in a puddle in its filthy court gets pleasure in abundance. The brilliant sunshine, the teeming garden, the atmosphere of repose, and the excellent music, were not, all put together, a patch upon the half a brick and three oyster shells to many who promenaded that day in the gardens of Nice.

"What am I to look at, my dear?" asked Mr. Chippering, bringing down his leg, as a natural result of excitement provoked by his daughter's exclamation.

"I'm sure it's him," exclaimed Miss Chippering. "I see the back of his head, pa—oh!"

Miss Chippering rose from her seat with excitement, and her father, remembering that he was a British legislator, rebuked her impetuosity, to which she responded with bated breath.

"Oh, pa, it's the Colonel. I'm sure it is. Do go and bring him here."

'The Colonel" it was, but he was much occupied. His

purpose in coming to Nice was quite well defined, and he was on the eve of carrying it into effect, for he had seen the Chipperings in the distance, when his attention was arrested by a woman of marvellous beauty sitting in what appeared to be a family circle.

She must be French, he thought, from her dress and her surroundings. The stout old gentleman with the large blue tie and white umbrella was unquestionably French, so was the middle-aged lady with the alpaca shoes sitting next her, also the young man with the flat-brimmed hat, and the man with the Legion of Honour ribbon, all French, yet her oval face and calm reserve reminded him of Muriel, and he wondered whether it could possibly have come to pass that she had found a way of her own apart from him that was not a desolate way; and he was jealous that one whom he had neglected and passed by was possibly happy, and that others found pleasure in a presence from which he was excluded by his own act.

It was clear the old passion was not dead, but that less noble aspirations had overwhelmed it. He was arrested in the commission of an act of sacrilege by the vision of a veritable Madonna, and it angered him. The appearance of this possible Muriel in his path awakened all the latent superstition in his soul, and nothing would serve him but that he must be satisfied whether this paragon was Muriel or not.

He was in the act of moving off to the near neighbourhood of the family party when a hand was laid on his arm, and he turned to face the haberdasher and the father of an heiress. The Madonna faded from his view; he gulped down his superstition; he appeared to move with alacrity to the side of Miss Amy Chippering, and in five minutes he was smoking one of Mr. Chippering's cheroots and flirting with his daughter.

Miss Chippering's volubility was boundless. She was so glad the Colonel had arrived—"turned up" she said; it was so nice to meet with a friend; she hoped he was not going away soon, and would persuade pa to take her to Monte Carlo, to all of which the Colonel responded by monosyllabic commonplaces and sedulous smoking. Then she began upon the Unusual Morality Association, as the Colonel knew she would in course of time, and asked how the subscriptions were coming in. The Colonel smiled, and nodded, and smoked. He even approached a wink of familiar confidence, that sent a spasm of delirious joy through the nerves of the excitable Amy, as he put his hand in the breast pocket of his coat and

drew forth a letter. It was from the secretary, and was in the form of a certificate of the fact that Colonel Delfoy's promise had been fulfilled.

"You will be able, Miss Chippering, to certify to your father that I have won my bet," said the Colonel, handing her the paper.

"Do you hear, pa?" she exclaimed. "The Colonel's won his bet. You've got to pay, pa. Oh, what fun!" and the frolicsome maiden flourished the paper before her father's eyes, and laughed again and again.

The haberdasher was more circumspect. He said nothing, but having read the paper, drew forth his pocket-book and counted out the notes. They were all of the Bank of France, and as he handed them to Delfoy he said:

"You are welcome, Delfoy. They're my winnings over yonder, and if you didn't take them perhaps the tables would."

The way in which the notes were passed, and the cool methodical manner in which Delfoy put them up in his pocket-book—the cold-blooded, imperturbable aspect he presented throughout the transaction, sobered the volatile Amy. She listened with concern as Delfoy, having put the notes away, took his cigar from his mouth and said deliberately:

"The tables may, in the ordinary course of events, get the notes still; but suppose we take an extraordinary course. Would you object, Mr. Chippering, to my making a present of jewellery to Miss Chippering?"

"Not at all," said the haberdasher.

"Just as a memento," continued the Colonel—"a little memento of a very pleasing family incident," he added, with studied deliberation; and then, facing round, he asked, with a smile: "Now, how long would it take you, Miss Chippering, to choose a few trifles? A quarter of an hour? Say twenty minutes. That will just give your father time to get through his cigar. Pray give me the honour of your company."

He rose and bowed, and with a considerable amount of trepidation, and all the vivacity—real and affected—clean swept from her manner, she walked away with the Colonel, as if in a dream.

It took less than twenty minutes. The Colonel seemed to know all about the contents of the jeweller's shop. He could scarcely have known more, so far as his special wants were concerned, if he had served in it for a twelvemonth. He had evidently made a preliminary inspection, and given an order.

They selected a ring of opals, all egg-shaped, set lengthwise round a large hoop, and at the point where the opals touched three diamonds were set on each side. It was a very rich-looking ring, and pleased the lady immensely; but there was more. The Colonel chose a tiara, not very large, but in excellent taste, and this also provoked a passion of joyful exclamation; but there was still more, a plain gold ring to fit the third finger of the left hand; and on the Colonel fitting it on, the coy young thing exclaimed:

"Oh, Colonel, do you really mean it?"

And when the Colonel said he did, the shopman having meantime buried his head in a closet to avoid his natural embarrassment, Miss Amy Chippering exclaimed, with fervour and delight:

"Oh, Colonel, how romantic!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REST OF THE NOTES.

THE temptation to take the balance of the thousand pounds to Monte Carlo and play at least one maximum was more than flesh and blood, in the person of Geoffrey Delfoy, could resist. He went by the next train, but although quite confident he was going to win, he took a return ticket and left a hundred pounds in his portmanteau to provide against accidents. This is a way they have who allow their imagination to run riot on the turn up of the cards and the twirl of the roulette wheel. Whatever disaster may have befallen them in the past, they feel perfectly certain that in this particular instance they are to be on the right side, and then the doubt comes—a staggering effort of the little caution that is left in them—a mere shimmer of the light of reason, and then away they go headlong and headstrong to toy with fortune.

He did not go straight to the Casino on arriving, but took a turn in the gardens to settle in his mind what he would do, so he told himself, as if it mattered what he did or how he did it. He sat on a seat among the palms and smoked a cigarette, to cool himself, so he said as he mused, and watched the goldfish in the running pools, and wondered whether the nurse-girls with the babies in the perambulators taking the air were part of the system, and whether the babies were hired by the Company to give the place that air of innocence usually attributed to it; and asked himself why London was not as clean and bright, and as free of beggars and poverty, and why in London people could not sit in gardens and smoke, and watch the goldfish and the babies, and see Punch and Judy or attend a concert gratis; whether, in fact, if there were a great Casino in Leicester Square, say, London would be freed of poverty and vice and dirt, and be made beautiful with luxuriant gardens and free entertainments of the first order; and having concluded that the subject was worth thinking about, he went into the Casino, put a maximum on the red, and won.

In ordinary circumstances he would have let the original stake remain on the red, but in this case he took up his winnings and waited. Black won next, upon which he left the table for a seat at the side to think it over; and the players who had been there all day losing with great assiduity remarked upon his proceedings with amazement. A man who could walk in casually, stake and win a maximum, and retire without risking the loss of it, was a phenomenon. They regarded him not merely with envy but animosity.

Delfoy, in the meantime, was thinking over the incident, in conjunction with the opals of the morning and the strange apparition in the gardens. He was gloomy. This new leaf he was turning over, or about to turn over, was not a bright and shining page, and his winning so readily was something of a shock to him. If the opal ring business was to be followed up a little capital would be necessary. It would be absurd to risk a loss. He would leave *trente et quarante* and amuse himself for an hour with roulette. The loss of a hundred would not matter. He would try Zero at every table in the room, until Zero turned up at each, and this would occupy all the time he had at his disposal. It would amuse him, and could not in any event be too costly. The notion accorded with his lugubrious humour, and did not rob him of the gratification of gambling.

The tables were pretty full. Every seat was occupied, and in some cases two deep stood behind the sitters. It was just past five in the afternoon, and no one in the rooms as yet thought of dinner. Delfoy proceeded in a methodical manner. He was bent on satisfying what may be described as his gambling conscience by using up the time, but he did not want to use it too fast in case luck went against him.

He cast his eye round the table and remarked an old lady with a paper and pencil before her recording the numbers that turned up, and finding by her record that Zero had not appeared for twenty coups, he commenced by putting a louis on Zero. "Vingt, noir," cried the croupier, and away went Delfoy's louis. He played another, and another, and another, up to twelve, and got his reward, thirty-five louis for twelve. He said it was slow work, and went off to the next table. There he saw two men quarrelling over the proper move to make, and two lovers putting five-franc pieces on the number corresponding with the age of the young lady, with melancholy consequences. Zero had been up somewhat recently, so Delfoy took a pass on the

red, and fell on a series which excited him somewhat on his reflecting that they had been single louis only. He noticed a man rush wildly in, throw a louis on the table, shouting "quinze," and hurry off in great haste as soon as he had lost it, as if he had come all the way from Fenchurch Street to stake on "quinze" and wanted to get back as soon as possible. Then a melancholy man came along and put ten separate louis on ten separate numbers, and did it four times over, losing the sum total. Then Delfoy began on Zero, and won the first time, which made the melancholy man turn deadly pale. Delfoy left his louis on, and won a second time. He was suffering sore temptation by these successes. It seemed as if he could do no wrong. He curled his lip and sighed and moved away to the next table. His purpose was to go through them all on Zero. It was his whim, his inspiration, and, fortunately for him, his superstition was in his favour and kept him to his purpose.

He went the round with varying success. He lost at only one table, where Zero was coy and was wooed forty times in vain. At the close of his round, when he had to think of his train and the business of the opals, he found his winnings exceeded the cost of the jewellery, and thus he had more than the thousand pounds in hand. He would have one look at the *trente et quarante* table, not that at which he had played, but at the other. He was in the act of putting a couple of louis on the red, simply because he must do something, when his eye was transfixed by the sight of a worn and haggard face on the other side of the table, old and wrinkled before its time, and its owner apparently in the very last stage of physical and mental exhaustion. It was his father.

Geoffrey drew back his louis and watched. The father was playing in thousand-franc notes, and was losing with a persistency that was appalling. He was playing on the theory that the cards should run in series of three; and occasionally they did do so, but they always made a change when he played, and came in series when he did not. A fat man with a bald head next Geoffrey, as he watched, said it was a wobbley day, but he was a humorist and a trifler. Geoffrey was serious, and grew more so as he saw his father's last note on the table raked in and the trembling hand go slowly to the breast pocket for another packet.

He went round the table and tapped his father on the shoulder. There was a guilty start and a look of horror on the

Filial Restraint

face of the father as he met the gaze of his son; he gathered up the notes he had produced, and with a trembling nether lip came out of the circle. As Geoffrey led him away he said harshly:

"You've had enough of this, I should say. You'd better come with me to Nice. The train starts in ten minutes."

"Why Nice, Geoffrey?"

"Because I'm going there, and I want you."

"But I must get my things."

"No, they can follow you. The railway porter can take your message. Come."

They travelled in a compartment alone, and when well on the way Geoffrey, who throughout assumed an air of command, asked:

"How long haveyou been here?"

"A week."

"And how much have you lost?"

"Everything except this twenty thousand francs—every thing. I've had very bad luck."

"And where did you get the money from to lose?"

There was a furtive look from the half-closed eyes, a trembling of the lower lip, and no answer.

"I understand," said Geoffrey; "that's the last of *everything*."

The father made a gesture of assent. His wretchedness prevented speech, and his penitence was abject. After a brief silence, during which he regarded his father with the eye of a connoisseur in misery, Geoffrey said:

"Well, cheer up and pull yourself together. I want to introduce you this evening to my intended spouse."

"What!" exclaimed the father in alarm, his losses forgotten, his impotence for all purposes of control unregarded. "Why have you not mentioned this before?"

"Only thought of it this afternoon."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Chippering. She's not a beauty, but a quarter of a million goes with her."

"Thank God!" exclaimed George Adolphus Leuchars Delfoy, and there is every reason to suppose that this pious exclamation came from his heart.

lavender—the instinct of the draper refused to condescend further—and the straw hat was replaced by a felt, in form and colour accepted by the multitude. And these are the influ ences that control the British legislator at those periods of his career when he should be allowed, in common with the acknowledged genius and the undoubted aristocrat, to revel in the freedom of an unusual costume. Amy Chippering, how ever, did not think so.

It was a beautiful day. The sun shone brilliantly, and the band played its best. The promenaders did their utmost to enjoy themselves. Sufferers from dyspepsia and chagrin, the melancholy through disappointed passion, and the failures in ambition, of all types and gradations, made their way through the cheery throng, who had no troubles because they had no aspirations beyond bread and butter and warmth. And there was Amy Chippering by the side of the British legislator, wearing more colours and more ends than ever she had done before, and flushed with hope and gratification, but desperately grieved because she had to cover up the opal ring with a glove.

The Delfoys, father and son, went the round, and in their languid walk they passed in front of the Madonna of the day before. Geoffrey let his father pass on while he assured himself the stranger was not Muriel; and yet how like, and, although merely a likeness of the rare original, how immeasurably superior to what he was going to. It was not Muriel; that was impossible. She turned and looked full at him, and turned away with placid indifference, not even annoyed, and as if she were accustomed to adoration from the passer-by—a queen among women, whose aspect chilled the common passions of the man, and made him worship the very form and outline, as of something not of flesh and blood. He heaved a sigh and passed on. Within twenty paces he found the bag of gold he was in search of, and introduced his father.

The introduction was an ordeal. The embarrassment on the Chippering side, however, was tempered by gratification; and while Geoffrey went through the business with the air of a man who was changing a large cheque, his father looked very like one who was eating olives for the first time in his life and trying not to let it be supposed he did not like them. Amy informed Geoffrey that she was literally entranced at his bringing his father—it was so considerate of him, and so necessary! She took everything for granted, and made no more doubt about the realisation of her hopes than that the

sun was shining. Accordingly, when Geoffrey proposed they should all dine together at the Reserve, she converted the invitation into a command, and named the time herself.

The conversation otherwise was not exciting. Mr. Delfoy told Mr. Chippering that he had been informed that Mr. Chippering was in the House. Mr. Chippering admitted that the information had a basis in fact, and remarked that he had been informed that Mr. Delfoy had sat there for some time. This having also been conceded as being capable of proof, they agreed that the House was not what it was, a self-evident proposition based on the knowledge that the House is continually changing, but which, nevertheless, was remarked upon as an entirely novel view of the political position, and one which they seemed to regard with much complacency. This subject being exhausted, they disposed of the weather, the season, the band, and the general prospects of the British Empire, to their mutual satisfaction.

It was in a spirit of whimsicality that Geoffrey proposed a dinner at the Reserve. He took an intense delight in reflecting upon the realisation of the programme sketched in the conversation with his father when the project of a marriage was first broached; and the enacting of the first step in that programme on the very same balcony was to him the perfection of a conceit. The airs and graces of the delighted Amy were strangely under control. The presence of the parent Delfoy awed her, and she was very much impressed with the evident embarrassment of the usually nonchalant Chippering in the presence of so much dignity and family pride. She hoped it wouldn't be always like that. They little imagined, however, the terrible sufferings then being endured by the head of the family. Lady Grace was constantly before him, nodding at him in his wine glass, menacing him from behind the chastened Amy, and standing bolt upright between him and the haberdasher whenever the Brummagem legislator approached garrulity or assumed a special confidence in his own importance. These were, indeed, moments of affliction.

After the dinner Geoffrey confided to his father that he had seen the Consul, and that he could be married in a week. The father reciprocated by confiding to Geoffrey that he thought a trip to Algiers would do him good, and that he would like to start in the morning, and write a note to Lady Grace headed "Africa" on the very day of the marriage, a proposition that made Geoffrey smile; but he assented on condition that his

father paid a formal visit to the Chipperings before departure and expressed the urgent necessity he was under to make the journey.

The week was passed by Geoffrey with the diligence of a novice and the resolution of a martyr, but he had the certainty of a golden prospect if not a golden crown to buoy him up. The haberdasher was incapable of reticence in a matter which illustrated his prodigious wealth, and the expected quarter of a million was often on his tongue. He was not so guileless as to imagine that Amy's charms had captivated the heir of the Delfoys, and he took it rather as a compliment than otherwise that he was able to buy an alliance with so illustrious a family.

On the seventh day the knot was tied, and being tied at the Consul's there was just sufficient of the surreptitious about the transaction to justify in the mind of the bride the absence of bridesmaids and to suggest the notion that she was eloping. After the marriage formula the haberdasher presented his daughter with a note addressed "Mrs. Geoffrey Delfoy," in a strange handwriting. It was from Robez the great London banker, informing her that they had the scrip of two hundred and fifty thousand in the three per cents. at her command, and the confiding girl handed it to Geoffrey, with artless gaiety, as a wedding present.

"Ah!" said Geoffrey, putting the letter in his pocket. "Damn nice of you, Chippering, damn nice."

And Chippering responded, flourishing his hand in the air:

"Don't mention it, my dear boy—a trifle. I always meant it, and it gives me pleasure."

With this he strutted round the room, lifting an ornament here and a book there, appraising them, and passing on in the mood of a Commercial Alexander ready to buy an empire or any other trifling commodity that fate might place within the compass of his aspiring bid.

Later in the day Geoffrey Delfoy wrote a note to "Dear Shout," enclosing to him an order for his hundred pounds, and saying:

"It's been of great use to me, my dear fellow. It has yielded me exactly two hundred and fifty-one thousand per cent., and when you have succeeded in losing your little capital by that interesting travelling company you are taking out I shall probably be able to start you in another spec."

The Lady Grace read the dreadful news in the *Morning Post* and was too angry to faint.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GROUND-FLOOR LODGER.

THE modern hermit does not live in a cave, but secludes himself as effectually as any of his antique prototypes in the midst of the crowded city. His methods are not dissimilar from those of the anchorite, except that he does not live on roots nor keep a goat, but is as a rule particular about his cuisine, and sometimes drives a brougham. He lives in chambers accessible to no one but himself and his servant, and the tendency of his mind is to regard all others with whom in the ordinary avocations of life he may come across as so many blocks of stone, or as trees or rivulets, convenient assistants to be used or obstructions to be removed. Here and there you meet with one of their order in a club, a place designed for social intercourse and the cultivation of good-fellowship, but used by the modern hermit as a place of security against intrusion, where he may sit and brood in silence and avoid communion with his fellow-men, for his fellows come to regard him as a table or chair, and he them as moving atoms to be avoided, but not otherwise interesting.

Morris Heritage was fast becoming one of these. A vein of melancholy had struck deep root within his nature, and was pushing its fibres into every crevice of the working brain.

The affair of the shooting lodge had taken too deep a hold of his sensitive constitution, and bade fair to waste a life of precious promise. With wealth sufficient to command the fullest leisure, and a capacity to appreciate every mental luxury that leisure can realise, he was gradually allowing himself to move in a narrow groove of city life from an exaggerated sense of obligation to those among whom he had been thrown as chief; for, contrary to the more general feeling, he, as a capitalist, was continually reciting to himself the obligation to his subordinates imposed upon him by his strength and their weakness. He was indeed a veritable slave to the sentiment of personal obligations.

Thus he was in town during the season of sport and pastime. Thus he had been walking gloomily down Oxford Street when men of his means were indulging a luxurious indolence at one or other of the thousand and one places where men acquire a renewal of vigour or contract typhoid as the case may be. Thus had he chanced to come to the rescue of Muriel and her children, and thus had he come to be Mrs. Littercan's ground-floor lodger with intent.

After months of cautious observation, chiefly arising from timidity and a wholly gracious fear of intrusion, otherwise colloquially described as "treading on corns," he came to a resolution, and arriving at his rooms one evening about half-past nine, he rang the bell for Mrs. Littercan.

By some gradual and unpremeditated process the ground-floor rooms had been practically refurnished. Two easy-chairs, and a couch that was not inconsistent with comfort, had displaced the severe structures of the Littercan economy. Heritage reposed on one of them and asked for a cup of tea.

Mrs. Littercan brought it herself, and presumed her ground-floor lodger was going "to stay the night." He thought he was, but was uncertain, and asked:

"Is Mrs. Lucas at home?"

"She is," said Mrs. Littercan impressively.

"Have the children gone to bed?"

"Yes, sir, they have," said Mrs. Littercan, catching her breath and clasping her hands with emotion.

"Then," added Heritage, "will you ask Mrs. Lucas whether I may come up to see her in a quarter of an hour?"

"I will indeed, sir," said Mrs. Littercan, and hurried from the room with so much trepidation that she nearly upset Littercan coming from upstairs with four window blinds needing renewal.

Littercan was a square-built man, with a square forehead and red hair. He had colourless, expressionless eyes, and a mouth that exhibited both in appearance and speech contempt of the world in all its phases. To some he was a disappointed man, to others morose, to others, again, he was a contemptuous, argumentative, denouncing opponent, but at home he was a docile beast of burden, a fetcher and carrier, a doer of odd jobs saved up for him during his absence "down the line" by 'Tilder, a quiet, enduring, uncomplaining, domesticated person, who looked for nothing in this world or in the next but his victuals at meal times and his long clay pipe after meals.

"Gently, 'Tilder. What's the row now, 'Tilder?"

"Oh, Littercan, I'm in such a fluster. But, oh, get away, there's a good man, and I'll tell you by-and-by."

"Oh," said Littercan, "she'll tell me by-and-by. That's a comfort to a sufferin' cove that 'as 'ad 'is corns trod on by the heaviest female outside of a show."

And Littercan went downstairs to mend the blinds, while Mrs. Littercan suppressed her agitation and waited on her first-floor lodger with the tremendous message.

She found Muriel sewing, with a book beside her, from which she read at times, between her work, quite happily, and to all appearances without a single regret or any sign of weariness, as with a pensive smile she sewed and read and sewed again, thinking only of her Philip making rare progress at his grand new school, of Theodora, with her dash and courage, and of little Ethel, all devotion and submission to her masterful sister; and in her love for them she was happy. And being able to satisfy their wants by means of that strange old lady's legacy, she had no wants herself, and sat on working and reading, the very embodiment of gratified maternal hope; and hoping on.

Mrs. Littercan had quieted her perturbed soul for the moment, but no sooner had she opened the door to enter on her mission, and deliver the most simple message that had ever been committed to her charge, than she straightway exclaimed: "Oh, Mrs. Lucas!" and was unable to utter another syllable.

"Dear me, Mrs. Littercan, what's the matter?" asked Muriel, looking up.

"Nothing, mum; I only just jolted ag'inst Littercan coming up the stairs; but, please, Mr. Heritage is come in, and he wants to know whether he can come up to see you in a quarter of an hour—about something very particular."

The "something very particular" at the end of the sentence was added by the old lady on her own account, as, with a large smile on her red face, she rubbed her hands one over the other and waited for the answer.

Muriel stuck her needle in the damask tablecloth, and pulled it out again thoughtfully, as she answered that she would be very pleased to see Mr. Heritage, and Mrs. Littercan said "Yes'm," and smiled and nodded, and went out of the room sideways, with her eye on her lodger, as if she expected to be the recipient of some special confidences.

Muriel, however, said nothing, but as soon as her landlady had left her she fell into a fit of abstraction, resumed the pricking of the tablecloth, and inquired of herself what that "very particular" thing could be that Mr. Heritage wanted to see her about; and failing to discover any reasonable pretext within her knowledge, she hoped it was something to do with Philip and Philip's future, and then went on sewing and smiling, with this precious hope growing more real and more glorious in its colouring with each stroke of the needle; and she thought how good it was of Mr. Heritage to take so much interest in her boy.

The imagined future of Philip had reached magnificent proportions by the time Heritage paid his visit, and there was just a shade of disappointment upon Muriel's face when, after making a few complimentary inquiries, he said:

"Mrs. Lucas, I am in a position of extreme perplexity, and have come to you for your advice, and perhaps your assistance."

So it was not Philip and Philip's future, after all, but some selfish purpose of his own on account of which he sought the interview. Still, he had been very good to them, and had opened up to Philip a prospect that she had never dared to dream of until he had actually accomplished the first steps and showed the paths to which it led. She would help him for Philip's sake, but she simply answered:

"Yes, I shall be very happy if I can do anything to aid you."

"I'm glad of that. It's half my difficulty removed, but I must explain."

With this he drew a chair within the circle of the fire, and nearer to Muriel, who listened with awakening interest and a growing sympathy as he said:

"My uncle, Mrs. Lucas, was a banker of great wealth and high repute, the controller of great enterprises, and the monitor of the most prosperous merchants of the City. I am the son of his only sister. I inherited his wealth and his responsibilities, and although I have innumerable acquaintances I have not a single relation, and do not feel that I have a friend in the world. I am indeed absolutely alone. My wealth makes me suspicious, and I fear I am prone to suspect my fellows of unworthy motives, and sometimes most unjustly. I fear, indeed, I have been becoming during the last ten years not merely misanthropical but hopelessly incredulous of the

existence of a disinterested, truly self-denying nature. The Christian religion has to me no practical examples in common life. Its acknowledged heads and pseudo prototypes are the embodiments of arrogance, and in too many instances of avarice and cunning. Many of our clergy, conforming and non-conforming, rival the Egyptian priesthood in the despotism with which they rule their devotees; and in politics, as in religion, a benevolent patriotism is found only among the very few. The whole gamut of political impulse may be strung on the one note—self; and, while supreme devotion to a cause is seen only among fanatics, a generous and modest sacrifice of self to the good of one's less fortunate fellows is so rare that when it is observed it is frequently remarked upon with alarm and as subversive of the foundations of society."

He had declaimed this extraordinary confession of faith, or rather want of faith in humanity, with passionate eloquence; and as he ceased and looked up he remarked an expression of amazed admiration on his solitary auditor's countenance. He smiled as he added:

"This is a strange declaration, Mrs. Lucas, from a comparative stranger, is it not? But it is necessary I should say this much for you clearly to understand what is to follow. These feelings have preyed upon me. The apparent purposelessness of life, the fearful agony which is endured by the majority of mankind in the mere effort to keep life within them, and the callous brutality which refuses the most ordinary concessions to the needy, which by some irresistible economic law seems to be an absolute and enduring necessity of commercial life, and even of social law, cause one to stagger at the mere contemplation of the future and the life that must be lived by the myriads of children born within the last ten years in this enormous city. But I will say no more on this, which has become with me a fateful ever-recurring delirium. I will tell you of something more agreeable. A new turn was given to my thoughts on that day I came to see you after our chance meeting in the street. Your children, and especially your boy, interested me."

"Yes," said Muriel involuntarily, for surely now she thought she was right in supposing he had come to speak of Philip.

"There was something in that commonplace meeting that I had never met with before, not in all my travels, and they have been many and far. None of you could have had any know ledge of me or my connections. You were, therefore, merely

dealing with a stranger, and the warmth of your gratitude for the very small and quite accidental service I had been able to render you made me feel that I had found at least one bright genuine circle, and this discovery awakened the hope that there were others."

"Why, of course, there are," said Muriel, who was feeling just a trifle bored, and she began to sew.

"And what conclusion do you think I came to?" asked Heritage, brightening up.

"I'm sure I can't tell, unless it be that you are very wrong to think so ill of everything."

"No," said Heritage, shaking his head; "I came to the conclusion that I should get married."

"Of course," cried Muriel; "get a nice bright young wife near you to bustle you about and make life cheerful for you."

"Well, you agree to that," said Heritage composedly; and then putting out his hand to stay the haste of her needle, he asked, looking full at her: "Will you be that wife?"

She dropped her work on her lap, and with a look of horror cried:

"Oh, no, Mr. Heritage; no, no," and hid her face in her hands, all trembling, as if some grievous trial had come upon her.

Heritage rose and put his hand upon her shoulder.

"I have shocked you," said he, "but I love you, and you have awakened within me that which none but God could kindle, and it cannot die. It may be bruised. It may be stifled. It may be thrust down and carried under, but it must live on, and it is for you and you alone to say whether the world is to be bright for me once more—and bright because of you."

Still she sobbed, with her head bowed down, and once she rose and beat her hands and cried:

"Oh, that I could!" and bowed herself again, and groaned as if in mortal suffering.

"Your husband does not live?" asked Heritage, still standing over her, and reflecting something of the passionate distress that she had shown.

"Oh, no, no."

"Then be comforted, and comfort me, and let your children have a father once again."

He stooped down and gently drew her hands from her face, and leaning forward, kissed her on the forehead.

She shuddered, and looking up with most distressful aspect, said:

"Let me think. Let me be. To-morrow. Let me think —till to-morrow."

He took her in his arms and kissed her once again, then left her silently. When alone, she thought in the anguish of her soul—and thought long into the night. In the eerie stillness she resolved; and from a secret place she drew a packet of old letters and a lock of hair, a portrait and a piece of soldier's lace, and one by one she burnt them to ashes in the grate, with a wild, unearthly look upon her face; and so, when all those hidden treasures were no more but dust among the cinders of the hearth, she uttered in a hoarse and hollow voice the single monosyllable:

"Dead!"

END OF THE THIRD PERIOD.

The Lady Alice

FOURTH PERIOD: THE EIGHTIES.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NEW LEAF.

THE turning over of new leaves is an act so constantly enjoined by moralists that it has come to be assumed that a new leaf is synonymous with amendment, and that in fact a "new leaf" means a good leaf. In the case of Geoffrey Delfoy it meant nothing of the sort. Although quite new to him in its resultant development and associations, the underlying principles of this new leaf he proposed to turn over were identical with those which had controlled him in the past. Geoffrey Delfoy was a born gambler, and while the new leaf enjoined abstention from Monte Carlo, and card clubs and bookmakers, it prescribed "The City" as the proper field for the exercise of Delfoy's undoubted genius for the manipulation of men.

The decade of which this period of the history here recorded treats was signalised by the intrusion among the ranks of born and bred City men of a perfect crowd of those who, by reason of their birth, had been brought up to regard trade as so much pitch in its power of defilement. The first steps of this encroachment of the people of the West upon the domains of the East grew out of the passing of certain Acts of Parliament, designed to enable people to club their money together to do certain things not within the power of the individual to accomplish, or at least to enable men of small means to co-operate in the conduct of large undertakings without undue risk. The public mind eagerly seized on this novel idea, and evangelists of the new commercial gospel were fruitful in devising the best way of taking advantage of the resources at their command. None gave such scope to the imagination as the utilisation of the aristocracy. The profound veneration in which commerce and the commons held everything associated with property and

the peerage, as is shown by the energy with which they aspire to acquire the one and denounce the other, gave to the names of persons of title a commercial value; and the quick-witted among them soon discovered that even the title "honourable" meant so much in solid gold per annum if taken to the right market.

At first the ornaments of the gilded salons of fashion were a little shy of being associated with the City. They went about the business pretty much in the same way as a man pays his first visit to a pawnbroker. They secreted themselves in cabs in Pall Mall, whispered an address in Broad Street or Change Alley to the driver, and crouched in the corner of the cab till they got past Temple Bar, when they gradually emierged from seclusion and did their best to make a show of famtliarity with the persons and places associated with their new ambi;ions. But one day it became current that the son of a Marqu s had gone into the tea trade, and a year later the son of a Prime Minister became an export merchant and issued a circular from Downing Street. This was quite sufficient. The whole ruck of the aristocracy, not otherwise fully occupied, made a rush to the City. Helter-skelter and pell-mell they hustled one another to be first in the field, and offered themselves to the highest bidder, regardless of everything so long as they were "in the City."

The natural consequence of this state of things was the development of "the promoter," and all that is associated with that mysterious functionary in commercial enterprise. The object of the law being to protect the public, and particularly the public investor, the object of the promoter came to be the evasion of all provisions calculated to give that protection; and accordingly coaches and four by the dozen were devised to drive through all the Acts ever passed by Parliament in this connection, and toll bars were put up at every entrance into the City to make sure that nobody took advantage of the law without first paying the proprietors of these several coaches and four, what moral philosophers, unmollified by familiarity with City practices, would be disposed to call "blackmail," so like were the practices referred to to those of the freebooters and cattle raiders of earlier times. But, owing to the conventional respectability of those engaged in the practice, its votaries became bolder, and not only drove their coaches and four through the Acts of Parliament, but positively drove into the High Court of Parliament itself and sat there as bold as brass;

indeed, it is currently reported that one of these commercial exotics of unusual courage actually painted his coach like the Lord Mayor's, and made believe he was right honourable and chief magistrate of the City of London itself!

In course of time the methods of the fraternity became so highly organised that vast establishments were created for the supply of titled directors on short notice, together with the most enticing baits to attract the unwary investor. One bolder than the rest announced to its friends and clients that it would undertake to float anything, from a gold mine to a patent medicine, and was especially designed to syndicate decaying royal houses and undeveloped empires. For this purpose it kept always in stock sundry foreign princes, and quite an assortment of the lesser continental nobility, the foreign article not warranted in all cases cleanly in their habits, but otherwise eminently ornamental, and all docile to a fault, when backed by a stockbroker and a solicitor who knew their business. The humorists of Capel Court said the managers of the institution had occasional meetings to practise the routine of boardroom business, and that budding secretaries were in constant training, that the crest on the seal of the concern was an empty money bag on a desk *vert*, with the motto *ex nihilo nihil fit* erased, all of which was vastly entertaining to the public, but no sort of consolation to those whom the public monitors described, when commenting upon some particularly atrocious villainy of this sort, as "the widow and the orphan." As a rule there was not much of the widow and orphan associated with the business, but merely an aggregation of those thirsters after cent. per cent., who, in their pursuit of wealth, neglect the first principles of commerce, that high interest means bad security, and that in the City you should trust no one further than you can see him.

The new leaf that Geoffrey Delfoy proposed to turn over had reference to this new condition of things. He had made good use of the Conqueror in providing himself with the necessary backstay in the shape of private capital, and now he resolved to have no more to do with him. The Conqueror and Luckross Castle and the County Families were all dismissed as so many effete institutions, and although they were not actually renounced they were put aside as of no present use. But there was this marked difference between Geoffrey Delfoy's procedure and those of his class who went into the City and let themselves out as honourable protectors of the

pnblic interest. He was never in his own person ever seen in the City: he Veiled his Hand, and hired the others, without their knowing it, to do those things that he thought it unwise to do himself. The monkey in the fable using the cat's paw to bring out the chestnuts was his constant prototype in the world of commerce; but he improved even on that, for he employed someone else to be the monkey.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GREAT CORADELL.

MR. SEPTIMUS HOWLER, of the firm of Howler & Smart, stock-brokers, was an altogether superior person, especially in the matter of decoration. It was computed by his intimate associates that, including the diamond ring and black pearl pin, he could not have been turned out for a less sum than a thousand pounds sterling, exclusive of the value of the distinguished personality himself. He was tall and broad and very shiny. The hair of his head was dark and shiny, and the hat upon it curved and shone in all directions, for the brim was curled and the crown was bell-shaped; his cheeks were rubicund and shiny, and his thin overcoat was lined with black satin much exhibited to shine at large. Of course his boots were varnished and immaculate. He wore a small moustache and a high collar; but his voice was coarse and his manner vulgar.

He had called early, by appointment, upon Geoffrey Delfoy in the Albany, where the distinguished Member of Parliament was able to seclude himself from domestic inconveniences, and devote himself wholly to politics and commerce.

Howler removed his hat and coat, and took his stand before the fire, by the side of which Delfoy was seated, with the morning paper across his knee, looking over the previous night's debate, and congratulating himself on having saved himself from six hours of it without anyone being a bit the wiser, for there had been no division.

"Colonel," said Howler, "we shall be at it some little time—may I smoke?"

"Certainly, my dear fellow, certainly. Make yourself quite at home, and don't be in a hurry to go away until this little bit of business is settled."

"Candid, Colonel—candid as usual," said Howler, lighting a particularly aromatic cigar. "Stop here as long as I want you, and then get out as soon as you can, eh?"

"No, no, my dear fellow. Stop as long as you please, but don't go till we have everything quite clear and straight."

"Then it *is* straight?" said Howler, and he laughed with rude incredulity, but without causing more emotion in the mind of the Colonel than was exhibited by a grim smile at the burning coals.

"You know, my dear Howler," said he, rising and thrusting out his chin, as he commenced declaiming with solemn precision, "this is a good thing—a perfect thing. It will simply boom from the first day it is placed before a discriminating public; but it must be placed in the right way." This was put pointedly to the resplendent stockbroker, with the forefinger very much to the front.

"Quite so," said Howler, assuming an air of gravity becoming to a prominent adviser of the investing public. '*I'll* see to that."

"Yes, my dear fellow; that's your part, and I rely on you implicitly."

"And who is coming to-day?" asked Howler. "How many, and what are they?"

"Three beside yourself to-day. There's little Alister of Bamberger & Alister, who supplies the commercial acumen. He will do exactly what I require, and if he doesn't know what I want on a given point you will find he will reserve his opinion until he has thought the matter out, which means he will come and consult me. You may trust him. Then there's Marmaduke Bray, the editor of *The City Tripod*, who, provided you will allow him to pretend that he is an independent authority, will also do exactly what I require; but you must give him plenty of head. I need not go into particulars, but you may take it that I have given Bray assistance, and have claims—yes, claims," pursued the Colonel reflectively. "I may say I have considerable claims. Bray will be all right, but let him show off. I want him to show off. It amuses me."

Howler laughed. He said he had had experience of Bray, in fact knew his measure and price, and he laughed again.

"Then," continued the Colonel, "there's Shad the vendor —poor Peter I call him, he always looks so miserable. I regard Shad as the most dangerous, but he's cheap, and any little mishap with him could be put right for half what it would cost in another case. A hundred-pound note is wealth in his eyes, and he'll get five hundred if this goes without a hitch."

Howler nodded, and then asked:

"What about the solicitor? Is Huckle coming?"

"Later. Huckle comes after you have all gone. A solicitor you know, my dear fellow, doesn't like to have personal instructions before others. There are things I must tell him that he may have afterwards to say he has never heard, and he couldn't say he never heard them if you, for instance, had heard me tell him."

Mr. Septimus Howler assented to this principle of action, nodded sagely, and smoked on.

"You see, Howler, solicitors are queer fellows. What their clients tell them doesn't count, provided it is told when they are alone, so you see it is convenient to have Huckle alone, and Huckle comes to lunch at one, when I shall tell him all about it. To-morrow you guide the coach."

There was a pause, and then the Colonel said:

"And now, my dear Howler, I suppose we had better call in Alister; he's in the next room."

He rang the bell and directed Dubley, who regarded the change in his master's habits and companions with amazement, and occasionally with consternation, to introduce Mr. Alister, and the next moment the acting and visible partner of the firm of Bamberger & Alister bounded into the room, eager to revel in the glorious proximity of the resplendent Howler, and actuated by the daring purpose of enlarging upon the state of the money market and the future of stocks.

Alister was a short and very stout imitation of Howler, with the polish rubbed off by wear. He had small dark eyes and a dark oily complexion, with black curly hair. He was dressed in a black broadcloth frock coat, a white waistcoat, and trousers of the largest check the loom could produce without obliterating the pattern. He wore a massive watch chain and an unusually large diamond ring.

Although Alister burst into the room with the enthusiasm which only an active imagination can inspire, the formality of the introduction and the distinguished bearing of the stockbroker, in which an impartial observer might have detected something of the insolence of a stage courtier, put a damper upon Mr. Alister's energy, and induced him to listen with special attention to the Colonel's formal remarks upon the purpose of the meeting.

"This is the matter," said the Colonel, "of the great Coradell Copper Mine in the Cape Colony that our friend

Shad has to sell, and I have explained to Mr. Howler that you are the very man for the commercial part of the directorship."

Alister put his hand on his white waistcoat and bowed. Then, clearing his throat, he commenced a declaration on the marvellous richness of the mine, as was perfectly clear from the sample of ore that the Colonel had placed on a side-table, with the box below in which it had been shipped from the Cape.

"This enormous mass, sir," continued Alister, "weighs two hundredweight, and it's almost solid copper. It has been hewn out of a mountain of copper. If you examine it you may observe the marks of the chisel, and I regard it as unexampled in the history of mining."

Observing to his great surprise that the stockbroker continued smoking without betraying the least emotion, he appealed to him beseechingly with:

"Surely, sir, you wouldn't prefer a gold mine, with all the terrible difficulties of extracting the metal from the quartz?"

"It's a matter of perfect indifference to me, Mr. Alister," remarked the stockbroker. "Gold or copper, silver or tin are all the same;" and having delivered himself of this evidence of his impartiality, he was about to resume his cigar when he observed a disposition upon the part of Alister to enforce his views of the superiority of copper mines, and of this particular mine above all others. Turning to the Colonel the stockbroker asked:

"Don't you think, Colonel, we had better put this matter on a plain footing at once?" and Delfoy nodding assent, he continued:

"I see, Mr. Alister, you have a very high opinion of this mine, and are quite capable of expressing that opinion; but we haven't met here to-day to persuade one another that this is a good mine. We don't, as a matter of fact, care whether it's good or bad. What we are concerned about is how it looks on paper, and how much we are going to get out of it. That's the business view of it to-day, and we had better set about considering those two important points on the settled understanding that we don't care a tinker's curse whether the mountain you talk of is made of copper or cart-horses."

Alister's eyes opened very wide at this declaration, for, notwithstanding he should, from previous experience, have become accustomed to the general disposition of the Colonel in commercial affairs, he was continually persuading himself,

as each venture came before him, that this at least was based upon a solid foundation of potential wealth. The sight of the large mass of copper ore placed in close proximity to the wooden case which had enclosed it, with all the marks of the long sea voyage ostentatiously exhibited upon its side, had filled him with an uncommon zeal. Here was indeed a prize, and Bamberger & Alister would be proud to be associated with so magnificent a venture.

It was a cruel blow to his generous enthusiasm to hear a great authority such as Mr. Septimus Howler ridicule the question of fact, and consider only the question of seeming. In some respects he was genuinely sensitive, and he was honestly distressed to discover in a few minutes that one whom he had regarded with idolatrous enthusiasm was little better than an unprincipled highwayman, or at least pretended to be. Alister sought consolation in the hope that it was only pretence, but his reflections and rejoinder were prevented by the appearance of two others, Mr. Marmaduke Bray, the accomplished and disinterested editor of *The City Tripod*, and Mr. Peter Shad, who was euphemistically described as "the vendor of the mine." He did not present the appearance of the owner of a mine, or of anything else to speak of. He seemed to be very much impressed by the distinguished company in which he found himself, and was too diffident even to salute the Colonel and his friend Howler.

His want of courtesy, however, was not noticed, for the entire company was at once monopolised by the autocratic Mr. Bray, and the diffident Shad was left alone to seek some out-of-the-way quarter of the room in which to put his hat and umbrella. He was a quiet man, spoke little, and only on matters of business. He was short of stature and high-shouldered, with dark eyes, dark complexion, thick lips, and nearly black hair of stubby growth. He dressed in black broadcloth of the ready-made cut, had a repellent manner, and made no friends. How much of his morose habit was due to nervousness and indigestion, and how much to an essential principle of evil in his nature, would provide an excellent question for the moral philosopher, but he was certainly a fitting instrument for Colonel Delfoy's present purpose, and, as he had said, very economical.

Mr. Marmaduke Bray was a great contrast to his companion. There was no want of assurance about Bray. Although of medium height and of commonplace physique, except

in the matter of hair, which was abundant and intrusive, he created an impression that he was an unusually largeperson, of profound knowledge and experience, and endowed with consummate judgment. This impression was not conveyed by his dress, which, although rather extreme in tone and cut, was not calculated to impress one, but seemed to result from his sonorous bass voice, that rolled out platitudes in great abundance, and was delivered with the air of a man who was accustomed to be listened to. Some people used to say it was his nose that commanded attention, and it must be admitted that there was a certain generic fulness about it, and a tendency to that curve which has been recognised and also satirised as the line of beauty, that would account for much of the pushing disposition of Mr. Marmaduke Bray. In ordinary circumstances Mr. Septimus Howler would have resented a manner of this description, but the circumstances were novel, and even Mr. Septimus Howler bowed to *The City Tripod*, and as a stockbroker devoted a good many offerings to its high priest.

"You know, Colonel, our friend Howler takes a too optimistic view of everything," he was saying when his companion Shad ventured on the outskirts of this portentous circle of City influence. "Mines, Colonel, are a little overdone. We must be careful not to overdo things. The investing public has become shy. There have been some ugly falls lately—very ugly—and I confess that for my part I regard mines as a drug."

Mr. Bray marched about the room as he delivered himself of this proposition, and even the Colonel, whose creature he undoubtedly was, felt somewhat abashed by the confident air and voluminous tones of the editor of *The City Tripod*. Alister's confidence in the superiority of copper, and of this particular mine over all others, was not merely shaken but obliterated. He was struck dumb, and looked to the stockbroker for support. Howler, however, continued smoking, and his only response to Bray's utterance was to offer Bray a cigar. Bray took it with the remark that Mr. Howler's cigars were always perfection; and when he had lit it he smiled with such affability as he smoked that one would have supposed he had been eloquent in praise of the enterprise they had met to fashion.

They were a curious company—curiously dissimilar in social status, mental qualities, and vocation, but they had a common purpose somewhat akin to the vulgar ambition of

Settling the Prospectus.

making black appear white, and their proceedings were the more curious from the way the oddly assorted company hovered between keeping up an appearance of commercial probity and recklessly daring complete indifference to everything but the criminal law.

"Don't let me throw a damper upon your enterprise, gentlemen," said Bray, when he had got his cigar fairly alight. "Don't let us falter on the threshold because we meet with a trifling difficulty. The public prejudice can be corrected by those who have its confidence. Friend Howler is a tower of strength in himself, and I can do a little to put tone into the money market. Tone is the great factor of commercial credit, eh, Colonel—Tone?"

This was felt to be very consoling, and the Colonel answered:

"No, Bray, you sha'n't throw a damper on us, and what's more, my dear fellow, you shall have all the assistance possible in working up the tone of the market."

"Quite so," said Howler, throwing away the end of his cigar, "but as time's precious let us see how it looks. Come, Colonel."

The Colonel responded by producing a few sheets of foolscap, fixed together at the corner, and assuming an impressive attitude, said:

"We need not go over the list of officials. You, gentlemen, will settle that to-morrow with the others. What we have to do now is to fix the major points."

"Certainly," said the stockbroker. "The capital and the price."

"The capital I put at two hundred thousand pounds," said the Colonel, "and the price at one hundred and fifty thousand, half in cash and half in shares. That's moderate enough."

"Too little," said Bray, again on the march, "far too little. Nothing can be done with a couple of hundred thousand. There's no room for anyone in a paltry figure like that. Your scheme wants breadth," he went on with great energy, and swinging his arm round as if he would embrace at least half a hemisphere. "You must have breadth, gentlemen, to catch the ear of the public. There's nothing to appeal to the imagination in anything under a quarter of a million, and I say half a million. Why, Colonel," he continued, bringing himself and his observations to a sudden halt, "where should I be with anything less than half a million? I couldn't put en-

thusiasm into a couple of hundred thousand. The idea's absurd."

And having thus settled the question Mr. Bray resumed his walk and smoke.

"What do you say, Howler?" asked the Colonel, who desired to exhibit the most perfect impartiality, and to shew he had no prejudices in favour of two hundred thousand or any other sum. It was apparently all one to him.

"Well, you see, Colonel," said the stockbroker, "there's a great deal of truth in what Bray says. You must have something to talk about, and there's a good deal more in half a million than two hundred thousand to talk about."

"More than twice as much," said Alister, whose enthusiasm was beginning to rise again, and who thought this a favourable opportunity to show that he knew twice two made four.

"You see, Colonel," Howler went on, "two hundred thousand is a commonplace affair, and this I take it is something exceptional."

"Decidedly exceptional," exclaimed Alister; "most exceptional."

"Very well," said the Colonel, with a sigh, "we'll put it down at half a million, and then what about the price?"

"Oh, of course," burst in Bray, "that increases *pari passu*. Three hundred and fifty thousand say, and throw out the odd twenty-five. You can afford to do that, Colonel."

Mr. Bray resumed his walk, remarking:

"It's of no use to be niggardly in these matters. You must make a thing *shape* well. The investing public are never attracted by a mean programme. They like to be dazzled. Friend Howler knows that. Colonel, you'll get your price if you work out your prospectus on the basis of half a million. I know them. I can unfurl the standard of the golden era to the tune of half a million with some effect, but a paltry two hundred thousand—never."

Mr. Bray had got to the other end of the room by this time, and found he had let his cigar out in the course of his declamation. The relighting it necessitated silence.

"Bray is right," said the Colonel; "eh, Howler?"

Howler assented, and made approaches to a more delicate subject.

"How does it cut up, eh?" he asked.

The Colonel cleared his throat, shook the foolscap paper, raised his eyebrows, and remarked, with apparent indifference:

"Two-thirds go to the vendor, and the other I leave at your disposal, Howler."

With this he threw the paper on the table, and put his hands in his pockets, with a sigh.

"Yes, yes," assented Howler, "and we drop all round proportionately as we don't get the half million."

"Precisely," said the Colonel, looking up at the ceiling, while everybody else seemed absorbed in the contemplation of one or other of the various objects in the room, as if they had no sort of interest in the subdivision of the third referred to, and would not for the world disturb the train of thought upon which the Colonel had entered. So indifferent, indeed, did they appear that anyone would have supposed they had been performing before at least five hundred of the future investors in the Great Coradell.

"Then it's understood," said the Colonel, "that the capital is half a million, and the price three hundred and fifty thousand; and you, Mr. Shad, will remember when you meet the promoters to-morrow that your price is three hundred and fifty thousand pounds. I suppose you can tell them about the property, eh?"

Shad, who hadn't spoken since he had entered the room, and was a good deal bewildered by the unconscionable use to which his friends had put the multiplication table, remarked in a bashful manner that he had the description of the property in his pocket.

"Yes, and you've been there and surveyed it," dogmatised the Colonel.

"I've just come from South Africa," said Shad apologetically.

"Of course you have," said the Colonel. "That's how you came to have the property to sell."

This was very instructive to Shad, who had never heard of the Coradell Copper Mine before that very morning, when he had for the first time looked upon the description of its extent and richness fresh from the artistic pen of Mr. Marmaduke Bray; and had heard casually, as a matter of no special consequence, that if things went well he would have a respectable sum at his disposal for the trouble of casting his eye over the various documents, and pretending the mine was his.

"Now I suppose," inquired Alister, "you did not see that massive sample cut out of the rock with your own eyes, Mr. Shad, eh?"

Shad hadn't.

"Why, my dear friend," interposed Bray, addressing Alister pointedly, "you don't suppose Mr. Shad has been going about South Africa with a crowbar and pickaxe levelling the mountains. That's not the way mines are bought. A capitalist like Mr. Shad has his mining engineers and his assayers and his agents examining the configuration of the country and estimating the mineral wealth of a district before he ventures upon a purchase in the interest of the British investor. Mr. Shad has a grand property, and he wants three hundred and fifty thousand pounds for it, and he's going to have it, so that's all about it."

This settled the question for that day at least, and they all left with the understanding that they met at the office of Messrs. Huckle & Broil, solicitors, Corbyn's Court, City, next morning at eleven. Mr. Shad would attend at ten-thirty to go through the formality of making the acquaintance of his solicitor, whom he had not yet seen, before proceeding to the weighty business of disposing of the Great Coradell Copper Mine. The vendor was thereupon taken charge of by Mr. Bray, and Mr. Alister had the inestimable satisfaction of being driven into the City by the crowning glory of Capel Court.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SOLICITOR.

THE Colonel had an excellent lawyer for his purposes, John Huckle, who could mark out the line between legal right and legal wrong to a hair's-breadth, and who would put a client through a labyrinth of criminal intent, with criminal profit, without committing a single act condemned by the Criminal Law, a choice spirit who accepted the dictum of Blackstone, that law is the perfection of reason, and added a view of his own, that it had nothing to do with morals.

John Huckle could not be better described than as an angular man. He had not a curve in his whole physical conformation. Anatomically he must have been very big in the bone, and for the rest of him, he was all muscle and sinew, without a particle of adipose tissue—an essentially tough morsel, of whom one might say he could have travelled among cannibals with impunity. As a lawyer he was rough and ready—much freer from those methods generically classed as red tape, but no one would ever think of John Huckle driving a coach and four through an Act of Parliament; it would, in his case, be a team of Clydesdales in a lorry, loaded with iron girders, heavy, irresistible, and square.

Huckle was not only knock-kneed, but his left leg was more bent than the right; his feet were very large, yet he never stood quite erect, but always swerved to the right or left when standing; his elbows stood out from his body when his hands were not occupied, and his neck craned forward or sideways, or any other way than upright. If he had been handed over to an artist to put him in order, he could have been made handsome and dignified, but moral obliquity seemed to influence every bone and muscle in his body, and a head that would have looked well under a full-bottomed wig upon the bench was disfigured by screwed-up eyes, a mouth that was always going awry, and a cheek and brow coursed with deep furrows in unlovely angles. What could

nature do against an influence capable of so much distortion?

The Colonel was having a busy time. Huckle, as he had said, was to come at one to lunch, and he came punctually to the minute. He brought a small bag with him full of deeds and plans and official extracts and certified titles to the property in the Great Coradell Copper Mine, all ornamented in the most approved style with red seals and green ribbon, and just a string or two of red tape to maintain the accepted traditions. He brought in the bag in his right hand, gave the Colonel two fingers of his left, with "How are yer, my friend?" put down the bag, and emptied its contents on a side-table, counted the papers, "One, two, three," up to "six," exclaimed, "All right, Colonel, everything in order; lunch first, business after, eh, Colonel?" and sat down as if the place were his own and the Colonel his office boy.

The Colonel didn't like it, but he said nothing. This was Mr. Huckle's private manner—his cabinet demonstrations, not his public and professional demeanour.

If it had occurred to him to consider the point, or he had been asked to define the distinction, he would have pointed out that ceremony was a waste of time between men who had a common object, who knew what they wanted, and how to achieve it.

"See us before the enemy, my friend," he would say, "that's the time for ceremony, and rule and order. The more the better, because when you flash the showy bits about the duffers don't see the substance, you know," and he would laugh aloud at the contemplation of his philosophy.

The same practical spirit controlled him in the matter of lunch. Knowing his habit, the Colonel had provided three thick mutton chops, juicy from the gridiron, and a little whisky and water. A delicate *dejeuner à la fourchette* would have been thrown away on Huckle, who protested he always went for substance and despised shadows.

"So this is going to turn out a good thing, Colonel, eh?" he asked, as they neared the close of the lunch.

The Colonel protested it was a very good thing, and that Howler took a brighter view than he did himself. Bray, he said, was enthusiastic, and insisted on doubling the price.

"And what's that for?" asked the lawyer.

"Because they think a mountain of copper is worth it, I suppose," said the Colonel unconcernedly. "But, my dear

Huckle, let's get the plans and maps laid out. I have something important to tell you—something very important, that you must keep me straight about. Upon my soul, Huckle, I would prefer not to tell you, but I am a little bit afraid of your making a slip if you haven't the actual point straight before you."

"Do as you like," said Huckle, rising and scattering the crumbs about, to the great annoyance of Dubley. "Tell me as much as you like, or as little as you like, but it's a bad plan not to tell your doctor all your symptoms and all your follies. If you had a supper of Welsh rarebit, and four whiskies on the top of a bottle of stout, don't tell your doctor you had nothing but a plain biscuit and a glass of water. No, no," continued Huckle, shaking his head. "That would be wrong—very wrong."

"Well, it's an important matter," said the Colonel in his most impressive style, "but we must keep it between our two selves, so lay out the large map, showing the whole of the lots."

Huckle promptly obeyed, and spread out on the floor a large sheet, measuring about six feet by four, upon which various plots were distinguished by numbers and colours. In the centre or thereabouts was a large irregular tract, coloured green, that represented the Great Coradell Copper Mine, and pointing at it he said:

"There's the article in question; that's the nice little lot that has cost you just over twenty-five thousand, and you're asking for it a comfortable three hundred and fifty."

"No, Huckle, not I—Shad. Keep in mind the client, Huckle, for God's sake. You make me tremble."

Huckle laughed a loud discordant laugh, and then added:

"Don't be afraid, my friend; John Huckle knows his client when he's dealing with the enemy. But I mustn't forget that you're behind Shad, else I should be handing him over the money, and that would be too realistic, eh, Colonel?"

He had his arms under his coat tails, standing before the fire, and as he put this question he cocked his head on one side, drew his mouth down at the left corner, closed his left eye, and exhibited to his friend and client his notion of a note of interrogation, in the form of a very ungainly contortion of the human frame.

The Colonel was appeased. The bare probability of transferring the full price of the Great Coradell Copper Mine to

Shad in place of the modest honorarium he had designed for him was a clinching argument against Huckle becoming too much absorbed in his ostensible client. The Colonel pursued the subject of the meeting.

"I want you now, Huckle, to show me the list of the whole of the properties that I have bought, and how the titles stand at this moment—all the properties round the base of the mine, you know."

"To be sure," said Huckle, and at once put his hand on the largest bundle of the papers. "Here they are: short abstract of each—complete definition of each plot, numbered according to the numbers on the plan—list of owners, from the original grant downwards, and précis of every official record."

"Now," said the Colonel in his most serious manner, "I'm going to put to you a very important question, Huckle, and when you've answered it I am going to tell you why I put it, and ask you again; but I want your answer first, so that I may have your answer uninfluenced by knowledge of my motive."

"Good," said Huckle, with his head on one side after the manner of a designing jackdaw.

"Is there any single part of the property surrounding the base of the hill known as the Great Coradell Copper Mine, and marked green on the plan—even so much as a square yard—that belongs to anybody but *me?*"

The Colonel shot out the last part of the sentence at his lawyer with such determination and earnestness that Huckle for the moment began to doubt, what he had never doubted before, that the whole of the land, for a band of not less than two miles, and in some cases extending for five miles, was the Colonel's, and the Colonel's alone. But when he had recovered his composure he answered clearly and emphatically to that effect.

"That's well," said the Colonel gravely, "very well;" and after a pause, during which Huckle regarded him with a comical expression of curiosity and amusement, the Colonel lifted his eyebrows and recommenced:

"Now, Huckle, I'm going to tell you the real bit of business I have in hand. The price I get for this wonderful rich copper mine—for it is rich, you know, Huckle—seventy-five per cent., I think, or more, I don't know—the price I say, Huckle, is only the first part of the business, because when Shad has sold it to the company it won't be worth twopence to them

as a mine until they have paid something more to me for something else."

"The devil!" exclaimed Huckle.

"No, not twopence, because they have no water on the land, and they can't get any except from me. Now, to buy my river down in lot 6, or to build a big reservoir and trench the hill would cost them a hundred thousand, and beside this, they haven't a road to carry the ore away, except through my land, and I sha'n't let 'em enter it except at a price."

Huckle skipped round the room and roared with laughter, slapped the Colonel on the back, and generally behaved himself with a total want of decorum.

"They can't carry away the ore by a balloon, Huckle, can they?" said the Colonel, grinning.

"Of course not. Ha, ha! oh, oh! What an infernal rogue Shad is! What a deep dog! He'll never tell me as he ought to do—ha, ha!—because he doesn't know it himself—oh, oh!—That rascal Shad will never whisper this to a soul. He'll let them all in, me included, and who would ever think it of him, so quiet and unobtrusive? Oh Lord, it'll be the death of me."

The lawyer sat down and wiped his eyes, and brought himself to a state of composure with a diminuendo of spasmodic jerks of merriment, and at last, being thoroughly recovered, he said in his own hard, mechanical way:

"Well, Colonel, you want my opinion on the case, as you put it, and my opinion is exactly as I put it before, and I'm right unless there's some infernal fanciful Statute out in those regions that we don't know of, and the sooner I find that out the better. I'll pump the Crown Agent, and get the information out of him before you act. When will you act, Colonel?"

"I sha'n't act. They will have to act. I shall only stand in the road. They'll have to get me out of the road. I'm a passive agent, Huckle. You'll be the solicitor for the company of course, and you'll advise accordingly. Shad must get another, and you'd better fix on one for him."

"Good," said Huckle, gathering up the papers. "Anything more?"

"No, nothing just now, except that you may as well keep in mind that I shall apply for a thousand pounds worth of shares myself, and I must trust to you and Howler not to let me have so many. You must put it that if I don't get the thousand I shall go about and talk, and that my grumbling

will put up the stock. Two or three hundred will be enough to get me a holding, you see."

Huckle did see, and was ready to start for the City, when it occurred to him to ask who the directors were to be, and to express a hope they would be good names.

"Oh, yes, capital names. Howler's done very well," said the Colonel languidly. "Alister is the only one that you know —Bamberger & Alister. There's a peer or two, and a younger son, and there's a Captain Somebody for secretary. You'll be amused with old Geizer. He's reported to be a German baron, but I expect he's a Dutchman of some sort. He's been out to the Cape, lived there, knows the property, and will be one of your leading cards. If he goes to sleep at the board meeting, leave him alone. He's better asleep, because we don't want his local knowledge developed *in camera*."

"Do any of them know anything about the matter?" asked Huckle.

"God forbid!" exclaimed the Colonel, who was now more at his ease. "It isn't necessary they should know. They are not selected for knowing. Howler selects them for seeming to know. It's the public's business to find out whether they know or not. The public ought to want them to know, but it won't ask the question. We don't want them to know, and we do ask the question. You see, Huckle," continued the Colonel, "the game is in the hands of the people who take care of themselves. The practice of the occult arts, of which commerce in its highest grades is one, is not reserved for the common mind. I dare say, Huckle, you would contest my proposition that commerce is an occult art, but if you do you are wrong. Commerce is based on concealment and discovery Sooner or later the many have to pay for their ignorance, and the few profit by their special knowledge. The severe moralist no doubt condemns everything in commerce that goes beyond barter, but the severe moralist in commerce is an ass."

Huckle, standing with his hat and coat on, his umbrella under his arm, and his black bag in his hand, nodded and grinned. To hear the Colonel moralise was a supreme gratification. It was much more humorous to him than any comic journal of his acquaintance. Encouraged by Huckle's attention, the Colonel continued:

"There was that fellow Bowdler, in the House the other night, preaching about what he called 'the ultimate resting-place of profits.' It was on a Budget resolution, and the

fellow represents a lot of those navvies, I suppose, or colliers, and wants to make out that we should all divide up. What does it matter where profits go to as long as there are profits. It doesn't matter to the State, Huckle, whether you or I get them or whether Bowdler gets them. We all want 'em; and whether it's you or me or Bowdler, the State may rest assured we'll get as much of what's going as we can. Why, look at this Great Coradell. I know about it. Other people don't. Why, Huckle, when you come to think of it, there are hundreds of people all over the country, now, at this very minute, making profits, and accumulating them in their quiet little way, by selling little bits of things over the counter—tapes and spinning tops, and bottles of gin, and so on—and when our friend Howler has set the ball spinning all these people will be hurrying up to have a bit of my Great Coradell, and they shall have it, and I'll have their surplus profits. What does the State care? That's commerce. So of what use is it for a fellow like Bowdler keeping men in the House from their dinner about such an absurdity as the resting-place of profits. But I know Bowdler. He wants some of the navvies' and miners' profits—and he's no fool."

The Colonel began shaking his head with extreme complacency at some thoughts the contemplation of Mr Bowdler's wisdom gave rise to, and Huckle took advantage of the pause to say:

'I've just thought of a solicitor for Shad, Colonel. Mr Trip, of Trip & Colley—very good man for us."

"Ah!" said the Colonel abstractedly.

"I'll call on him on my way back, and arrange for him to attend to-morrow. It will be better he should take the matter in hand at once."

"Yes, yes. You'll keep him straight, my dear Huckle."

"Oh, yes, I'll let him know where the plum is to be picked. Trip has a keen scent for the sugary bits in life. Bye-bye."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ARISTOCRACY IN THE CITY.

MR. SHAD burrowed among the courts and alleys of the City early next morning, and discovered Corbyn's Court under an archway with iron gates originally designed to secure the privacy of an aldermanic residence, and perhaps to guard the aldermanic plate. The mansion at this time had been cut up into numerous sections, and Mr. Shad discovered the doorway of No. 4 squeezed into a corner of the Court by some recent utilitarian owner, who by this means of access had converted a range of domestic offices into a considerable yearly revenue. Mr. Shad, after much peering about, discovered a board on which was dimly discernible the name of Huckle & Broil, solicitors, followed by the word "Basement." The dust of many years had encrusted upon it, indicating to persons of experience that the firm was of great age and stability, but conveying to Mr. Shad the idea that it was very poor; and he went downstairs with some misgivings as to his future acquisitions by this curious enterprise upon which he was engaged, for his Colonial experience supplied him with no parallel to the fact of anything in the nature of wealth being associated with systematised dirt. But, reassuring himself with the reflection in his molish way that he could not possibly lose anything, because he had nothing to lose, he went down the stairs stealthily, and found a doorway, the upper part of which was glazed so as to admit a portion of the very poor light on its other side into the passage in which he stood—another indication, he thought, of the extreme poverty of Huckle & Broil, but otherwise interpreted in Metropolitan experience as a commonplace example of the art of making the most of things, a principle that was still further illustrated by the painting of the name "Huckle & Broil" upon the glass doorway, so that it could be deciphered by visitors without the expense of artificial light.

Shad opened the door and made known his wants to an

ancient clerk, who appeared to have taken a vow of silence, for without speaking he noiselessly conducted the visitor into the presence of Mr. Huckle, and closed the door upon him with great care.

Huckle's room was large and low, and was lighted by a range of windows looking out on to some garden ground, and although the struggling laurel and privet bushes could not be said to be flourishing, the sight of them in contrast with the mass of dusty papers, tin boxes, and gloomy furniture spread about the room, gave one a feeling of being at least upon the surface of the earth and not in cavernous depths burrowing for fugitive gold. Shad also received some satisfaction from the sight of the sample of ore cut out of the Great Coradell. It was conspicuously placed on a small table near the window, with the South African packing case underneath it as evidence of its genuineness, and with the light full upon it to show there was no deception.

Huckle received Shad with a friendly nod, and asked him to sit down, which Shad did, while Huckle continued reading his letters as if he were quite alone. Shad would have been entertained if he had been a more appreciative person than he was by the amazing contortions of Huckle's face as he read his letters, for with some his eyes went up into the middle of his forehead, and with others the deep creases of his cheeks stretched down to the bottom of his jaw, then his mouth would purse up and emit a low whistle, and for every different emotion awakened by his correspondence he seemed to be provided with a different muscular movement of his unusually hard face.

When he had gone through his letters he turned to Shad and said:

"You've got a good job on hand, Mr. Shad—a profitable job," and saying this he nodded and smiled, and seemed to be shaking hands with himself.

Shad said he hoped the thing would turn out well, and moved nervously on his seat.

"They'll be here in half an hour, you know," said Huckle, "and in a minute or two your solicitor will be here."

Shad looked surprised, and said:

"Will he?"

"Yes," said Huckle, nodding and grinning. "Mr. Trip, of Trip & Colley in Gray's Inn. He's to be your solicitor. I'll tell him all about it. I shall represent the company.

I can't represent both you and the company—oh dear no. That would never do, Mr. Shad; but I may give you a bit of friendly advice. Whatever you do, don't go beyond the statement in the papers you have in your pocket, and don't do anything but what your solicitor tells you. Refer everybody to Mr. Trip."

The lawyer had scarcely finished this piece of advice when the door opened and Mr. Trip himself appeared. He was a thin elderly man, with a very pinched face and long projecting nose, that he was much given to screwing up when reading documents, as if the distortion of his nose was in some way connected with the process of extracting information from the writings.

"Good morning, Mr. Trip; here's your client. Take his instructions, we shall soon be ready for you. Here are the documents."

So saying Huckle handed over a bundle of papers to Trip, who merely shook hands with Shad, hoped the business would be managed agreeably, and then took no more notice of him, but began reading the documents with great eagerness Huckle, in like manner, continued engrossed with his correspondence, and Shad was left to himself with as little ceremony as if he had been only another sample from the Cape—a necessary and accidental, but otherwise wholly uninteresting subject.

This was the condition of things when Mr. Septimus Howler entered the room. Both the lawyers, as well as Shad, rose to receive him.

"Good morning, Mr. Howler," said Huckle; "let me introduce to you Mr. Trip, of Trip & Colley, Mr. Shad's solicitor."

Mr. Howler said he was glad to make Mr. Trip's acquaintance, shook hands with him, nodded to Shad, and presumed everything was in order. Upon this Huckle took him apart and explained Mr. Trip's position.

Before he had finished there was an arrival—Baron Geizer, a short, stout, and florid person, with a large round face and a very small amount of fair hair. The Baron was followed by Captain Sickle, who stood six feet four in his stockings, and hoped to be made secretary offhand. He was hurried into a waiting-room until the formality of election should have been gone through, and was much consoled by a nod from Howler, whose familiarity conveyed great wealth of promise.

The next arrivals were Mr. Alister, who wore a blue necktie in honour of the occasion, the Marquis of Maladore, who wore a wig, and used gold-rimmed eye-glasses upon a faint and expressionless face, the Honourable James Flaire, a prime specimen of the younger son, who dyed his whiskers and moustache a raven black, and finally Mr. Walter Gowcher, who claimed to be a member of one of the Inns of Court, and to have been at Cambridge, but who had never in the whole course of his life overcome the difficulties of the aspirate, and whose mode of speech was otherwise eccentric.

But, whatever his education or profession, Gowcher was a very useful man. Howler knew his value. Education and culture are not always associated with accumulations of capital, and Gowcher moved as a great authority among the aristocracy of Hackney. What was more natural than that Gowcher on meeting an opulent grocer should say, "That's a good thing the Marquis of Maladore and me's bringing out," or, "If you'd like a flutter with that Great Coradell me and the Marquis of Maladore's got a 'and in I'd back your application." The consequences are obvious. The glory of the peerage, reflected though it was by the somewhat harsh and illiterate accents of the parvenu Gowcher, was still reflected, and, strange as it may seem, "me and the Marquis" caused many a pretty sum to fall into the treasury of companies that owed their being to Mr. Septimus Howler.

"You've got a extra good thing 'ere, my lord," said Gowcher to the Marquis on being introduced. He felt it was his duty to say something encouraging—Howler, he thought, expected that.

The Marquis put his eye-glasses on, and peering up into his new acquaintance's face, for Gowcher was a tall man, he said:

"Oh, you think it a good thing, sir?"

"Rather, my lord; I shouldn't 'ave been 'ere if it wasn't. There ain't been such a good thing in the City for many a long day."

"That's encouraging," said the Marquis; "I am glad to hear you say so."

And he expressed his delight by getting as far away from his embryo colleague as possible. As he approached the door his old friend General Dowles arrived breathless with haste. He had attended two board meetings already, signed the attendance book at both, and had rushed off to assist at the

introduction to a confiding public of this new joint-stock enterprise.

"Now, my lords and gentlemen," said Mr. Howler, "I think we are all here, and I presume we may ask the Marquis to take the chair."

This was quite in accordance with the inexorable laws of precedence and the feelings of the company. The Marquis took the chair, and found before him a piece of foolscap on which was written in large round hand the heads of the business to be transacted, all artfully indicating without absolutely expressing the conclusion it was expected the eminently respectable company would arrive at after ample discussion.

The first item suggested a statement from Mr. Howler, who said that before introducing the Great Coradell mine to their notice he wished to point out that it would be necessary for them to have a secretary, and that Captain Sickle, who had signified his desire to act in that capacity, was in the next room, and was ready to assist at once, without committing my lords and gentlemen to any engagement. This was pronounced by general consent to be very liberal on the part of the Captain, and he was invited in at once, to take his seat on the left hand of the Marquis, who, addressing the company, presumed it was their pleasure to utilise Captain Sickle's services as secretary without any obligation on either side.

The human cormorant is usually gracious and conciliatory so long as the carcase is only expected and not present. Eager self-assertion and determination to acquire the tit-bits come later. There was not a man at that meeting who would have objected to anything whatever proposed from the chair at the instigation of Mr. Septimus Howler. They were all looking forward to getting something for themselves, and they felt that any resistance to granting what was proposed for others would only be inviting examination of the grounds for placing some morsel at their disposal. The resplendent Howler, indeed, was regarded as the controller of a sort of lucky bag, and although the assembled company had every confidence in him, from his general reputation and past experience, they could not resist a feeling of anxiety as to what he had in his bag for them individually, and this anxiety seriously conflicted with the necessity to preserve a grave demeanour and a watchful eye in the interests of the public, as provided for by the Statute. It is true Captain Sickle had nothing but work at present at his

disposal, and no money; but everyone present knew what the thin end of the wedge meant in these cases, and if Howler had asked them to swear on the edge of a drawn sword to stand by Captain Sickle to the death they would have done it; and what is more, without any swearing at all, they resolved by simple intuition that Captain Sickle was to be the one and only secretary of the Great Coradell.

This done, the organisation was complete for the great initiatory function. The vendor, mute, humble, but sinister, supported by his solicitor, sat at the end of the table. The Stock Exchange, gorgeous and resolute, sat at the side of the table; and on his left was Huckle, the presumptive solicitor to the new but as yet unformed company. The rest of the party, including the Marquis at one end of the social scale and the incomprehensible Gowcher at the other, officiated as guardians of the public investor, and assumed as wise an appearance as possible. Mr Howler informed "my lords and gentlemen" that they were all business men, a piece of gross flattery that none of them felt it possible to deny, and that no doubt they had other engagements that they were anxious to keep, a statement that General Dowles, who hoped to score another three guineas by signing his name in a directors' attendance book round the corner if he left the Marquis's party at two, cordially approved. The eminent stockbroker accordingly, not wanting to beat about the bush, said that Mr. Shad had the Great Coradell Copper Mine for sale, and was prepared to sell it for three hundred and fifty thousand pounds, and that it was proposed to bring out the company at half a million. Provisions would be made out of the purchase price for finding the necessary qualification for the directors, and every precaution had been taken to prevent any false impression getting current as to the *bona fides* and value of the mine. This delicate reference to the services expected of Mr. Bray was not fully appreciated by those present, until it was supplemented by the statement that the editor of *The City Tripod* had expressed a very high opinion of the venture. The eminent stockbroker concluded his statement by calling attention to the sample of ore which had been brought from South Africa for their information by Mr. Shad, and which was sufficient evidence in itself of the extraordinary richness of the estate now offered to them.

At the conclusion of this very brief and matter-of-fact statement the Marquis coughed feebly, resettled his glasses, and

exclaimed with much interest, as if he had made an important discovery:

"Oh, then this is a mine we are dealing with."

"Yes, my lord," said Howler, with all seriousness, "a copper mine."

"Oh!" said the Marquis, "very interesting. South Africa. There's a great future for South Africa I'm told."

"There ain't a more likely place for good specs in all the world," said Gowcher with energy, to which the Marquis, being at the other end of the table, responded:

"Ah, yes, you say so. Very good."

The Honourable James Flaire, who had been smoking cigarettes with great assiduity up to this time, thought it proper to rise and inspect the sample. It was natural that every other defender of the rights of the public investor should do the same; and they one and all examined it very closely, made much of it, patted it gently, and seemed quite glad to make its acquaintance, as indeed they were, for its presence was, at least, a tangible proof that it had come from somewhere and had been hewn out of something, and may as well have come from South Africa as anywhere else. As Mr. Flaire had been the first to inspect the sample, so he was the first to express an opinion concerning it. Standing at a little distance from the block, and looking at it with an air of doubt, he remarked, with modesty and some hesitation, that it was not very bright.

This gave Mr. Alister an opportunity, of which he took full advantage, discoursing of pyrites and sulphur and arsenic with great volubility, and declaring that the sample, though not actually metallic in appearance, was the richest ore that had been put on the market. He also explained, for Mr. Flaire's benefit, that it was not a coal-scuttle, nor a frying-pan yet, and therefore was not as amenable to sand and elbow grease as he hoped, by their energies, the entire mountain would be in course of time. Of course they all said they hoped so too, and were very glad Mr. Alister, with his practical knowledge, was among them to assist in bringing that result about.

The Marquis, who looked at the ore with a passionate desire to understand all about it, listened to Mr. Alister's disquisition with great respect, and felt in a measure comforted by his discourse. Mr. Gowcher eyed him the while with a patronising air, and the General lent the proceeding his formal

The Great Coradell Promoters

approval by looking on. Mindful of Delfoy's injunction to restrain the German baron from exhibiting an excess of zeal, the discreet Huckle showed his interest in the sample by edging himself in between the Baron and the others. The vendor was engaged in the rear by Mr. Trip, his solicitor, who was explaining to him what he proposed to say in his behalf; and as Mr. Shad had no more idea what to say for himself than the Marquis had, he also felt much comforted by having a few ideas provided for him. The stockbroker looked on as if he supposed the inspection was necessary, and had to be endured, but the gallant Captain, who hoped to be secretary, seemed to be desperately in earnest about the business, and no doubt felt the eyes of the rest of the company were upon him as his were unquestionably upon them.

As soon as the company had resumed their respective seats, Mr. Trip, incited by the more astute Huckle, who said nothing, explained that his client was quite prepared to submit samples from any part of the property for analysis, and the property itself to inspection and survey. To save time and trouble he had already provided himself with the analyses of the sample before them, by an analyist of great public reputation, a Fellow of the Royal Society, and a mining expert. This report showed great richness, between seventy and ninety per cent. of pure copper; and he believed Mr Huckle would advise them that their obligation would consist in getting proper advice from experts on this and kindred matters.

"Ah!" exclaimed the chairman, "yes. We're not mining engineers and assayers, are we? What do you say, Mr. Huckle?"

Mr. Huckle had no hesitation in saying they were not, and further expressed the opinion that no one expected them to have any special knowledge about anything. Mr. Howler gave point and substance to this legal deliverance by assuming an air of critical suspicion and informing Mr. Trip that he would be expected to furnish reports from accredited surveyors, mining engineers, and other experts on whose judgment the promoters would be justified in relying.

"Then you'll do that, Mr. Trip," said the General decidedly. "So that's settled. Now, Mr. Howler, what are the arrangements?"

There was a hush of expectation at this, because everybody had great regard for the General's keen scent for plunder; and as it was thoroughly well understood that none of those

present, from the vendor and chairman down to the German baron, had any intention of subscribing a penny piece towards working this most valuable mine, it was necessary to know first who would subscribe, and secondly, what the assembled company would make out of the transaction by looking on. Being openly challenged, Mr. Howler remarked in quite a casual manner that a matter of twenty or thirty thousand pounds would be set apart out of the purchase price for what he euphemistically described as the necessary preliminaries, and that perhaps the best course would be for the chairman and Mr. Alister to be nominated a committee to arrange the details with him and the vendor.

This was applauded as a prudent measure, for there is nothing so highly approved on general principles by all managers, whether individual or corporate, from a parish vestry to an Imperial Government, than to shunt responsibility on to somebody else. Moreover, Mr. Septimus Howler, with great tact and delicacy, reserved until this moment the additional inducement for referring matters of detail to a small committee the important fact that in the course of a few days he hoped to have completed negotiations, only commenced within the last twelve hours, but most favourably entertained, which would result in an important member of the Government joining their board before they actually applied to the public. This impressive statement was received with hushed enthusiasm, and a general murmur approved the reticence of the stockbroker when he said he preferred not to mention the name of the distinguished person he referred to, and merely wished the committee to have power to authorise him to complete the negotiations.

The Great Coradell thus emerged from the embryonic state under the guidance of the two solicitors who had preserved a discreet silence, except to make obvious remarks of no consequence, and the meeting adjourned for twenty-four hours, having settled everything, and committed itself to nothing, in the most approved form of joint-stock enterprise.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COUNTESS OF BOLORE VERY MUCH AT HOME.

THE government of a people used to be an affair of the sword: in later times it has become a conflict of the mind, a war in intellect, which sounds vastly better than "an affair of the sword." But while "the mind" and "the intellect" are popularly associated with all that is dignified and great in humanity, they comprehend also the meaner impulses of cunning and cupidity; and since these frequently provide the motives of aspiring politicians, and give rise to deception, and passing by on the other side, and generally to having recourse to the by-ways of the children of darkness, under cover of the cloak of honour, the sword comes out rather bright in comparison. The battle-axe and the claymore are ugly weapons, and blood is not agreeable to contemplate as a factor in politics; but physical courage in the matter of cold steel is, after all, not a bad virtue to cultivate, and is altogether preferable to the encouragement of the arts of dissimulation, colloquially known as dodging and bilking, which form so large a portion of the political methods of to-day.

The Right Hon. Peter Finnessmore was an active politician. There was nothing he did not know, nothing he would not undertake, and nothing he would not do or risk in the achievement of a party move; and nothing also calculated to annoy his party, the doing of which he would not have entertained with a free and open mind, if that annoyance would have contributed to his personal advancement. For he was a man of principle, and he professed patriotism.

Finnessmore was a bachelor, aged forty-seven, an active and energetic man, with red hair, thin at the top, parted in the middle and bushy at the sides, with bushy eyebrows, a bushy moustache, thick lips, and a shaven chin. He had an inclination to a white hat and light tweeds. He was generally the first white hat to blossom in the House of Commons, and where he could not wear tweeds he contrived a grey frock coat of material approved by the public voice.

He lived with his widowed sister, the Countess of Bolore, who was not unlike him in disposition, but had been more successful in her diplomacy, as she had become a Countess and a widow. She had an only child, the Lady Alice Joycey, the heiress of her father's estates, in strict settlement, who was pretty, sensible, and accomplished, and therefore, despite the extinction of the peerage, had many admirers in this her second season. The Right Hon. Peter Finnessmore had views concerning the future of his niece.

Bolore House was a centre of political intrigue, enshrouded and interwoven with the mazy glamour of the social gathering and the various extravagances of fashion. The Countess was an excitable, restless creature, with red hair, a pink complexion, and a piercing eye that no person would suppose ever closed, even in sleep. She was impatient at reverses, but fretful only when she had nothing difficult of accomplishment on hand. She was wealthy, for the Earl had been generous; and her brother, who was poor, managed her property, an arrangement that opened up a large field of enterprise for the Right Hon. Peter, associated with a delightful absence of dangerous responsibility.

Finnessmore had become, by dint of much scheming and not a little inferential threatening, sworn in one of Her Majesty's most honourable Privy Council, and an under Secretary of State. This having been achieved, and the honours having been worn for some time, and worn threadbare, he proposed to himself to become a principal Secretary and Cabinet Minister; and the question he asked himself, morning, noon, and night, was, on what principle this distinction was denied him, when a similar one had been conferred upon Torchleigh, a thoroughly inexperienced and uninfluential person, and had been actually forced upon Machim (who had never been heard of a year before), to the great astonishment of the political world and the chagrin of every subordinate minister? It was this important topic that had brought Finnessmore up to his sister's boudoir one morning about eleven o'clock before going to his office. Something had to be done to stir somebody up, and the Right Hon. Peter had got an idea.

The Countess, it must be stated, was contemplating at this time a garden party in the gardens of Bolore House, and had supplemented the arrangements of her gardener by the construction of temporary bowers formed of tropical and subtropical plants in great variety all about the grounds, so as to

give the idea that the company was assembled on an island in the South Seas instead of in a common-place London garden; but also designed to impress Society with the fact that it was the custom of the Countess not to do things like other people, which was perhaps a far more powerful motive than any other.

Finnessmore was desirous of taking advantage of this project, and resolved that by means of his sister's assembly Bowdler should be got at. The Countess, however, had certain ambitions of her own of a special nature apart from the ordinary desire which she shared, in common with certain eminent retailers of soap or pills, of keeping her name before the public, and these ambitions were wholly inconsistent with any trafficking or negotiation with the notorious Bowdler. She never for a moment supposed that the anxiety of the Right Honourable Peter to examine and comment upon her list of invitations had any other basis than fraternal love. The Right Honourable Peter, on the other hand, never allowed his mind to wander from the absorbing hope that he would get Bowdler invited. He accordingly pursued the task with great art and circumspection, and with rare generalship kept his sister in entire ignorance of his chief purpose in furthering the garden party.

It was to be a great gathering, including royal, illustrious, and right honourable personages at the top, and public entertainers at the bottom. It was not to be a political gathering, that was certain—otherwise the Prince could not come; but it was to fulfil a political purpose—otherwise it would be useless to arrange it. To show that it was not the product of chagrin, Torchleigh and Machim were to be asked, and to put out of question any surmise that it was a party affair, a reputed journalist, who, it was whispered, had attacked the Government, was already on the list. To give it an artistic flavour, four Royal Academicians were to be invited, and the drama would have an opportunity of being represented by a tragedian, a low comedian, and a walking gentleman—the last with aristocratic connections of unquestionable status. But in order to give the gathering a truly society flavour, Lady Bolore had secured the promise from a dear friend of hers that her party should have the distinguished honour of the first appearance of Sylvanus Bulley, the great explorer, who would bring with him two others—a reformed cannibal, who had been seen to eat a missionary, and a backwoodsman, who was known to have

shot fourteen men in a single afternoon. Obviously, in these circumstances, the political element was subordinate.

This was the foundation on which Finnessmore built his hopes of getting his sister to invite Bowdler, who had become a terrible fellow in politics since he had dined with Chippering at Queen Anne's Gate; and in one way and another had exacted a deal of homage from those who are usually associated with the idea of exacting homage from other people; but Bowdler commanded votes, and votes in these days comprehended everything.

Bowdler did not, perhaps, clearly understand it, but he was a perfect autocrat in his way—he not only ruled party politicians but ordered his own millions in quite a Roman Emperor style, and did it all by talk. He drew awful pictures of their downtrodden condition and their mean spirits, and exhibited by comparison what a high-souled, patriotic sort of person he was; and how, if they did as he told them, they should have their bread buttered on both sides, and their children should bathe in treacle. It was rather odd, too, that his millions seemed to like being sneered at by him, and did pretty much as he told them to. Bowdler thus became a great political force, and all those who were on the lookout for political fulcrums made obeisance to him and generally grovelled before him.

But Finnessmore had to admit that nothing the Countess could do would assist him unless he could also procure the assistance of Delfoy, who by some legerdemain had worked upon Bowdler and instilled a sentiment of amiable condescension into his soul. Delfoy was no friend to Finnessmore; he was treading too closely on his heels in the way of making a position; and would certainly not have been put on the Countess's list if Finnessmore had seen his way to do without him at this important juncture. The Countess had no objection to Delfoy, not in the least. She thought him a charming man, with the most insinuating manners, and incapable of any action that would either detract from his own dignity or compromisehis friends—in fact, in the estimation of Lady Bolore, Colonel Delfoy was perfect—but the mere mention of the name of Bowdler in relation to her party awakened the strongest aversion.

"My dear Peter," she exclaimed, "what can you be thinking of? Bowdler, that abominable person! why, it's impossible."

"Well, but my dear Carry," expostulated Finnessmore,

"the man Bowdler is a power. He's supposed to belong to the other side, because of his extreme opinions; but I know better. He's open to conviction. He's to be handled, and I want to handle him. Lots of them have tried without success, and there'll be enormous credit attached to the handling of Bowdler —enormous."

Finnessmore seemed to be much impressed with the magnitude of the undertaking he projected. He gasped as he uttered the word "enormous" as if human reason failed to comprehend the prodigious value of handling Bowdler.

The Countess tapped on her writing-table with her pencil during her brother's declaration, and then remarked with unusual solemnity:

"No doubt, Peter, but there are some other considerations to be taken into account beside the political in settling my parties. I expect the Duchess of Cowdry."

This was said with decision, with triumph, and with evident expectation that it would be conclusive, for the Duchess of Cowdry had been long angled for, but had never been caught.

Lady Bolore had never yet secured representatives of the old nobility at her parties. They would receive her; and call on her; she might appear at their parties and accept their gracious patronage; but to distinguish her by actual presence at a miscellaneous gathering was more than any reasonable person could expect from a duchess. A royal personage might so condescend, because a royal personage naturally sanctified the surrounding conditions, but if the duchesses did not maintain the embrasure of an exclusive discrimination what was to become of Society?

Finnessmore knew all this, and quite appreciated the triumph comprised in his sister's hope; and, as he wondered, with some trepidation, how this expected triumph had been achieved, she quickly informed him. The Duchess had called; there was a secretaryship to a royal commission associated with Finnessmore's department to be filled up; the Duchess expected Finnessmore to get the appointment for her nominee; and Finnessmore would have to comply. My Lady Bolore had assured the Duchess that Finnessmore would do all in his power; and the Duchess had assured my Lady Bolore that if Finnessmore did all in his power nothing more was needed. My Lady Bolore hereupon artfully intruded mention of her garden party, and the expected presence of the Prince and the Prime Minister, thought she might promise to have the

matter settled by the day in question, and suggested it would be so very nice to communicate that the matter was settled on that very agreeable occasion, if the Duchess would honour her; and the Duchess felt that, although the price was high, it must be paid. Consequently in the opinion of Lady Bolore only two things had to be considered: the securing of the appointment and the regulation of the invitation list to conciliate the prejudices of the Duchess. This was a serious blow to Finnessmore, but he bore up bravely, and although he knew the secretaryship had been already disposed of in another direction, he declared that the appointment was at the command of the Duchess, and reverted to the Bowdler question as if the name of the agitator had never been mentioned before.

"But, my dear Peter, it's impossible to ask Bowdler here with the Duchess," exclaimed his sister. "Surely you understand that?"

"Well, I can't say I do," said Finnessmore. "Bowdler's a member, and he's surely as good as Bulley's cannibal."

"Not at all," said the Countess. "Mr. Bulley is the greatest novelty in society, and his cannibal is perfect. They say he's quite presentable."

"Well, you'll allow that if the Prince will meet Bowdler the Duchess will not object?"

"I'll allow no such thing, and you know the cases are entirely different."

"But, my dear sister," pleaded Finnessmore, "would you have me sacrifice the glorious opportunity of handling Bowdler? Just think of it."

"Why can't you make yourself agreeable to him at some men's place?" she asked. "A club, for instance."

"Wouldn't do," said Finnessmore, shaking his head hopelessly. "Nobody would know it; and it must be known to be of any use. Besides, I can't ask the Prime Minister to meet Bowdler at a club. The thing must be done casually, accidentally, and with the least possible irritation; and *that's* what I'm about. Why, if this had been done a month ago I'm sure I should have had Machim's place. They couldn't have passed me over."

There was a silence, and finding it embarrassing, Finnessmore exclaimed, by way of filling in the picture:

"The thing that troubles me is the colossal stupidity of the Prime Minister, who doesn't see the tremendous mistakes he

is making by these recent appointments. If they are repeated, what's to become of the country?"

It wasn't anxiety about the fate of the country that induced the Countess to give five minutes' consideration to the question of adding the name of an objectionable Member of Parliament to her list. It was a question of Peter's interests as opposed to the sentiments of the Duchess. But the notion of handling Bowdler had acquired too strong a hold on Finnessmore to permit him to give it up. He continued to urge the point, and finally, in a fit of desperation, his sister announced her assent by the inquiry:

"How do you spell the creature's name?"

The card was written with every sign of vexation, and when it was handed to Finnessmore he rubbed his nose with it as he remarked that he would send it through Delfoy.

"Send it how you like," said his sister. "I've done with it, and am very much vexed. I shall have to write to the Duchess and tell her, and then she won't come."

The fact was that it had come to be bruited about that the Countess had "such queer people" at her assemblies; and this was a very serious matter for the Countess, because in the estimation of the unquestionable the Countess was considered "queer" herself in the matter of origin, and was allowed to be admissible only because she was a Countess. She knew this, and the knowledge was a great trouble to her, a continual check upon the brilliance of her imagination, and prevented the commission of many a social vagary that would have afforded unusual delight to her friends had she only dared to perpetrate it. And here she was saddled with "the horrid Bowdler" at this most critical time.

But there was more trouble brewing.

"Are there any newspaper people coming?" Finnessmore asked, apparently with perfect indifference.

He approached the subject warily, for there had been arguments before on the same topic.

The Countess winced. The lady correspondent of *The Toilette*, as she described herself, had been seen at the Countess's gatherings—a gaunt person with spectacles and a note book, who peered up into people's faces and asked their names. People had pretended to be shocked at this, and perhaps some of them were, but the majority gave their names, and had the infinite satisfaction of seeing their costume described in *The Toilette* newspaper, which devoted itself

largely to "At Homes," and recorded the gossip of the tea-tables in quite a sprightly manner.

The Countess thought it odd that Finnessmore should trouble himself about a matter of such small moment, and said the woman was quite harmless, to which Finnessmore responded that possibly she was, but that he objected to the note book, and asked why she could not go about her business like Squarely the reporter of *The Frivol*, who never showed his trade, though he did presume somewhat, and was inclined to force his company on those who would prefer to be without it.

"I shall not ask *him*," said the Countess, with decision.

"Then how will you get a paragraph in *The Frivol?*" asked Finnessmore in amazement.

"Go without."

"Oh, no, you won't," said Finnessmore. "There will be a paragraph, and it will depend upon Squarely as to whether it will be agreeable or disagreeable; and Squarely will regulate his views by the way in which you treat him."

Finnessmore said this looking out of window, as if he had been remarking upon the state of the weather or the crops. He regarded Squarely as in the category of the east wind, an unexpected shower, or a casual blight—as something disagreeable, but to be borne—and better than the east wind in one respect, the tempering of it was in one's own hands.

"But Squarely is a most improper person I'm told," exclaimed the Countess. "I don't know what he's done, but they say he's dreadful."

"So he is, my dear, but he goes everywhere, and why shouldn't he come here, when he can make himself very disagreeable if we deny him?"

The argument was conclusive. Squarely was invited, and so were half-a-dozen others, who were bidden for no other reason than because they were objectionable and might make themselves particularly so if left out on this occasion.

"And now, my dear, where do you propose to dine to-night?" asked Finnessmore, who had yet another project.

"At home," said his sister.

"Would you object to accompany me to the Heritages'?" he asked.

Finnessmore had had a request from Heritage, who was very influential in the City, to launch his stepson Philip into the political world. Philip was just home from Oxford, at the age of twenty-three, full of honours, and eager for distinction in the

greater world. His amiable stepfather had thought of Finnessmore, and Finnessmore had no objection to an additional private secretary of brilliant university attainments, and with a valuable City connection: for Finnessmore's whole life had been devoted to the making of interest. So Finnessmore would take the Countess to dine at the Heritages', *en famille* with Lady Alice, and they would together inspect the proposed new private secretary.

All this was explained to the Countess, with appropriate embellishment and fanciful adornment associated with stocks and shares and "good things" in the City; and as the Countess thought the Heritages nice people, especially Mrs. Heritage, she agreed to change her plans and dine in Cavendish Square.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DOMESTICITY.

THERE is nothing about which a man of small means, or of no means at all, is more certain than that he would make the best possible use of great wealth if he had it; and there is not a man living but has some fault to find with the way other people spend their money, and who does not assert, with a confidence that admits of no qualification, that he could administer vast revenues to greater advantage to the State, and with more credit to himself, than any other person under the sun. It was therefore a source of constant amazement to Morris Heritage's friends and acquaintances, and a subject for special animadversion with many of them, that he kept so moderate an establishment and led a life of so little diversity. His great wealth was acknowledged on all hands. His fiat in the City was absolute—even his partners, older men than himself, bowed to the strength of his accumulations and the soundness of his judgment—yet his tastes remained simple, and his chief ambition was the sound training of his adopted children and the contemplation of the natural development of their dispositions.

Other men of no birth, less wealth, and grosser tastes, emerged from the squalid processes of City muckraking and dazzled the populace by scattering tinsel gewgaws in their faces. These had for their reward the homage of the gaping millions, and in their train came trooping impecunious politicians, the dregs of the Court, and every phase of the later nineteenth century greed, which specially exhibited itself in an absorbing desire to reap without sowing, and to gather without even putting the hand to the sickle, to say nothing of the plough.

Heritage, perhaps, erred in the direction of exclusiveness and shrinking from notoriety and blazoning, and it might be said that he did not actually fill his station; but, then, his nature had been strained in the direction of repression, and he shrank with a sense of shame from any act which seemed to

speak boastfully of his wealth. So it had come to be said that he was unsympathetic, proud, and even mean, for his failings were variously described, according to the disposition of the censor. That he was contented, and that those he had about him were happy, did not count. Morris Heritage was rich. Why, then, did he live in Cavendish Square instead of in closer proximity to the most distinguished quarters of the highest possible social surroundings? It was true he chose the house because he liked it, and because its position was convenient and agreeable to him personally and to those about him; but these considerations should not count in the estimation of those who order their daily life and surroundings by the imperious laws of fashion, and the still more commanding influence of what other people may think of them and their doings; and seeing that these other people regard this as the golden era, in the sense that nothing is good, nothing desirable, nothing virtuous, and nothing should be done unless it is costly, Morris Heritage was wrong to live on the other side of Oxford Street when he had the means to live in one of the costliest and most coveted houses in all London; and he was wrong to live a domesticated life and refrain from participating in the dazzling hypocrisies of conventional pastime; he was especially wrong to permit his stepdaughters, who now bore his name, to revel in the glories of an amateur studio, and to be painters and sculptors, to the neglect of all the common place accomplishments, and to fit up a music-room and give family concerts of a unique character instead of wholly devoting their energies to the manner in which they should disport themselves in places of fashionable resort after the manner of the species as constituted by the Procrustes of the hour.

But the family, as it had grown up in this happy-go-lucky style, was very happy indeed working and endeavouring—sometimes even striving with the self-denial of genius—without regard to custom or accepted patterns of social demeanour; and, setting aside only a few outbreaks of temper on the part of Dora—whose disposition, in its impetuous variety, seemed something foreign to the Heritage household—they managed to achieve that contentment which is seldom attained to by any of the many thousands of anxious souls who have been provided, by accident or reward, with a superabundance of this world's goods, but without the proper complement of brains to use them.

It was a great event in the family history that Philip, now a Heritage like the rest, had returned from Oxford eager for the great work of life, and ready, upon his stepfather's advice, to do precisely that class of thing that Heritage felt himself unable to undertake. Philip was to devote himself to the State; he was to enter upon politics as a profession; he was to begin by acting as a private secretary, and Mr. Finnessmore was to be his mentor, which showed exactly how much Morris Heritage knew of politics and the political world.

Thus it came to pass that Philip arrived home on the afternoon of the day the Right Honourable Peter had settled the various important questions connected with the garden party in the highest possible spirits; for, contrary to the Right Honourable Peter's expectation, Philip had called on him about noon to make himself known in a more private and formal manner than his mother's drawing-room or dinner-table would permit; and he burst into his mother's boudoir about four o'clock to tell her all about his visit and what came of it.

"Oh, mother," he cried, clapping his hands, "I've a glorious prospect before me. I see it all in magnificent array, and feel quite inspired."

She looked up from her writing-table, and smiled at his enthusiasm, and then he kissed her tenderly and drew a long sigh, as if his conception of the magnificent prospect were too big for words; but breaking out again, he cried:

"I've been to the House, mother, and seen it at work. There was a grand fluster going on about something I didn't quite understand—a matter of honour and a personal explanation. But the Speaker, mother! I should like to be the Speaker. He's the first Commoner!"

With this, which was uttered in low and awe-inspired tones, he drew a stool near his mother, and sitting down upon it, he put his elbows on her knee and began to tell her all about his visit, from beginning to end, just as he would have told her of some boyish incident at school, for although at this time he was three-and-twenty years of age, and full of a ripening ambition, he was still a little boy to his mother when alone with her, and laid his heart quite bare to her, even to his follies and regrets. She was indeed a mirror to his inner thoughts, and in these tender confidences he betrayed himself to himself, and so got glimpses of thoughts and feelings within his inmost heart that but for these passages would never have been re-

vealed to him; and so, without the sharp reflection of the mother's character to mark them out in contrast, and expose them in measured line and truth, they would never have been presented to him for encouragement or correction as his appreciation might suggest.

"You see, mother," said he, "father thought it better I should make a formal call, and I went down just about twelve, but found Mr. Finnessmore was engaged. When his business was ended, and I was shown into his room, he asked me, as it was late, to walk down to the House with him. Wasn't that nice of him? It was so free, and put me quite at my ease; and I think, mother, he's a capital fellow, and oh, so engaging."

There was some indication on Muriel's face of a reserve of doubt. She smiled, she was sympathetic, she encouraged her boy to continue his story, but she was clearly anxious beyond the limits of a mother's caution, and showed more concern than should, in common phase, becloud a mother's hope.

Those who may have followed her story through all its perilous passages — more perilous and more fraught with perilous endings than her imagination even pictured for a single moment—will have seen that any step she may have taken, any deception that may have been practised upon her, and whatever she may have done or assented to upon the road, her thoughts were not of self; and hitherto, although she had suffered much, her fears were always fears of danger for her boy.

This step of Philip's was none of her seeking. How much better would it have been, how earnestly had she prayed that the thoughts of her boy should tend to channels far removed from those in which she knew another strode with sinister intent, and who might chance at any time to cross his path, and blight the blossoms in the hedgerow, and blacken, as with a lightning stroke, the distant flowers that he hoped to pluck. A quiet country life, a life of travel, or a deeply studious life had been her hope, and often had she let fall a word or two to set the current of her husband's thoughts in such and such a line; but nothing came of it, for craft and cunning had no part with her; and, as the lines drew nearer to the point she feared to think upon, the attrition of her mind increased, and gave new force to what had always been the constant pain engendered by the past. And though in her waking thoughts the life and movement of the hour—so wholly

satisfying her utmost hopes for the happiness of those about her—mellowed the past, and battered down the sharper edges of those fearful memories, they still pursued her in her dreams, and sometimes made the silent hours of the night a time of terror.

Still there was no thought, bred of this agony, of the terrible results to herself and her husband likely to follow possible discovery. So far as she and Heritage were concerned, if the consequences of open avowal had ever clearly impressed themselves upon her mind, they were now almost forgotten, and in contemplation of the larger concern were quite ignored. The resolution taken in the upper room in Torrington Square had become a dim remembrance, and its possible consequence a most remote and shadowy prospect to be repressed resolutely in all waking moments, and secretly endured only in sleep; for in sleep it came unbidden and unrestrained in phantom shapes, and with horrible undecipherable threatenings. These visitations continued to be hidden even from herself, but the future of Philip was a subject of continuous and avowed solicitude. The dangers that might beset him assumed every possible shape that an overwrought fancy could suggest; and every change of circumstance on his part kindled new alarms in the breast of the devoted mother. Thus, in the very hour of his enthusiasm, and on the eve of this great and most desirable step in life, she was alarmed for her boy's future.

"You would have been pleased if you had seen me," he said, "going down Parliament Street with Mr. Finnessmore. He knows so many people, and tells you all about them as they come along, and then the policemen stop the traffic to let you pass the crossing. I felt quite elated. And then in the House," he continued, as his mother smiled, suppressing her fears, "the sight is very impressive, not so much from what one actually sees but from the associations it awakens. I had not much time for reflection, however, for there was a terrible shindy going on. I couldn't follow the matter in its detail, the action of the House was so unfamiliar and its forms so novel, but from what Mr. Finnessmore told me I understood it was a personal matter, in which a member had accused a Mr. Delfoy of having used his office as member of a committee for advancing some purpose of his own. The attack was made by a fat man, not over clean, with rumpled shirt front, and wearing a frock coat two sizes too large for him, big as he was. He affected an heroic manner and a superior virtue; and do

you know, mother, Mr. Finnessmore said it was more than likely he had himself done the thing he charged this Mr. Delfoy with, he was so supernaturally earnest and indignant," and Philip laughed at the idea, for although he never for a moment thought it could be true, he was delighted with the whimsicality of the suggestion, and thought a great deal of Finnessmore for having said what he felt to be a good and supposed to be an entirely original thing.

The mention of the name of Delfoy in this accidental connection sent a spasm through Muriel's breast. She exhibited no emotion, and made no betrayal of the shock she had received by the sprightly recital of her boy's first Parliamentary experience. She restrained herself from any betrayal of her feelings only because the danger was constantly present to her mind, and singular as the coincidence was she accepted the incident with the submission of a fatalist, as the natural and inevitable consequence of the past, and as a warning.

"Mr. Delfoy's manner," he went on, "was a great contrast to that of his accuser. "He was calm and incisive, cruelly cold, almost malignant, and his poor, excited, emotional opponent was reduced to utter prostration."

The mother listened with eager attention as the boy went on, now walking the room with excitement as he recalled the stirring incident, and acting the manner of the belligerents with fervid gesticulation or cynical contempt as the characters required. When in the midst of a piece of ardent declamation, that he had retained with surprising accuracy, the door opened and his elder sister appeared, wearing a brown holland apron, with sleeves, and with a skirt to her heels, all smeared with clay, and with her fair hair skewered in a tousley knot on the top of her head, while to add to her eccentricity she rubbed her nose with a lace-bordered pocket handkerchief.

"I want you," she said, "in the back. I'm waiting for you."

"In the back" was Dora's studio, an annex with a top-light built out from the offices, and now furnished with all the trappings of a sculptor's atelier. The floor, the platform, and the shelves bore testimony to the bounty of her stepfather and her own zeal. Castings of the busts of Greek philosophers and copies of basso-relievo from Athenian mausoleum were scattered about indiscriminately, with a miscellaneous collection of arms and legs, including a cast of her own foot and another of Ethel's hand, with copies of them modelled in clay; and all over the walls there were casts from clay modellings of Ethel's

ear, Ethel's nose, and Ethel's hands, in every variety of position, so that any sympathetic statistician might have calculated the number of hours of patient suffering Ethel had endured to gratify the commands of her sister; but now Philip was to be the subject, if Philip would.

Philip, however, was too much engrossed with his subject even to apprehend the wishes of his sister: he put her and her request aside with a joke about Mrs. Plasterer, and a perfect maelstrom seethed and bubbled behind Dora's passionate eyes and the laced pocket handkerchief scourging her nose. She was unused to indifference just as Philip was unconscious of offence. She positively lowered at her admirable brother with a wrath that was incapable of expression, and, being baffled, beat itself to death from sheer incapacity on her part to understand how the distressing circumstance could arise of Dora being thwarted. The fact appalled her, and she turned scowling on Ethel, who came into the room at this moment with her composed look of passive indifference to maelstroms and Dora generally. Ethel was accustomed to her tantrums.

"You should have seen how perfectly this Mr. Delfoy put the man down," continued the unconscious Philip, oblivious alike of the sister's anger and the mother's alarm. "It was a matter of surgery; he used the knife without a quiver—cut deep and long, and then, instead of an emollient, he poured vitriol in the wound, and smiled! His callousness was marvellous. At the finish—feeling, I suppose, he had succeeded in putting his accuser in the wrong—he assumed a manner of angry indignation, and appealing to the Speaker, seemed to be tearing his victim limb from limb, and then, flinging the fragments on the floor, to spit upon them. It was stupendous! I shall never forget it; and although I could never like the man, I cannot help admiring the striking excellence of his art."

"I wish I had been there," said Dora, sitting on a low stool and nursing her chin on the cushion of the grimy pocket handkerchief. There was something in the scene as described by her brother that satisfied the bitterness of her nature; and she took refuge from the anger with which her brother's indifference had inspired her to revel in the contemplation of a commanding rancour that gratified her imagination.

"What sort of a man is this Mr. Delfoy?" she asked. "Is he a big man, and does he *look* cruel?"

"No," said Philip, laughing. "He's not a big man, and

Philip describes his Father

looks complacent rather than cruel, except when he is engaged in denunciation. Then his appearance is implacable, and he has, ch, such a cruel eye!"

"Ah," said Dora, with a glow of satisfaction, "it must have been grand to see him. I should have been inclined to scream with delight."

"Oh, Dora, how can you say so?" asked Ethel, who had been watching her mother during this colloquy, and had noticed the look of horror that passed over her face at Dora's question. She seemed paralysed with terror, and looked from one to the other with speechless dread. Dora laughed as she said:

"You don't understand these things, Ethel. I adore strength—even the cruelty of strength—and I despise weakness and the weak." She flung a look of passionate contempt round the room, and did not hesitate to include even Philip in the deprecating glance. "I like to hear of things that are great and strong and daring. I wish I was a man to dare and do like that."

She stamped her foot and clenched her hands, and went out with her bitterness to work upon the passive clay and mould a demon out of the clod she had put up for Philip—to shape a hard and cruel face such as her imagination conceived would express the spirit of this man Delfoy, whose action Philip had described. So she was appeased, and having endowed her model with humorous contortion, she laughed at it, and finally, striking at it with a mallet, reduced it to a shapeless mass.

While this exhaustion of a quite unnecessary development of passion was going on other incidents of a calmer and yet highly emotional character were in progress, arising out of this chance conversation about Philip's morning experiences. The departure of Dora, observed in silence by all three, provoked Ethel to action of the sympathetic and simulating order.

"A cup of tea, mummer, and a little nap, eh?" she said, with a smile. She made no reference to Dora's outburst, nor thought of construing the cause of her mother's pallor, her silent terror, and suppressed pain. She merely suggested the palliative as appropriate to the condition which she saw, without reference to the cause, which was unknown to her. Philip looked on with some anxiety as Ethel enforced her prescription by taking her mother by the arm and gently conducting her to her own room—throwing a meaning glance to Philip as she passed through the doorway. Philip understood he was to wait, and did so, wondering what could have caused the sudden collapse of his

mother in circumstances so wholly dissociated from her. The situation was so incomprehensible that he felt even sympathetic speech would add to the embarrassment and the pain she felt, and he looked on in silence.

"That's Dora," said Ethel, when she returned. "She often bursts upon us like that, and it pains mother. Promise me, Philip, that you will watch and do what you can to check her."

She put her hands upon his shoulders, and looked up at him pleadingly and yet trustfully, without any undue emotion, for like her mother she spoke little, and like her mother, too, she waited, waited, waited until the revolving passion within and without consumed itself and then the embers could be taken and spread out and she could pick out from among them whatever grains of precious metal lay bruised and crushed among the dross. She had no knowledge, nor had Philip, of the true cause of this discomfiture of our Muriel. They had no clue. It was impossible they could have traced such hopeless distress to the mere mention of a name, much less could they have divined a connection between the working of her mother's mind and Dora's outburst of unrestrained passion, or her unqualified admiration of the method of a Member of Parliament of whom she had never before heard.

"Where is Dora?" asked Philip.

Ethel nodded her head in the direction of the studio.

"In the back, I think," she said mysteriously; "she always goes there, or somewhere where she can be alone, when she's put out."

"Let's go and see," said Philip.

"We never do," said Ethel solemnly, and with eyes of wonder fixed upon her desperate brother. "We leave her alone till she comes out."

She spoke as of some strange being whose nature was a mystery to be respected, and concerning whom her only duty was to wait upon events.

"Then what am I to do?" asked Philip. "I am to correct her and yet not to go to her. You're a wise one," he added, putting his arms round her shoulders. "We must go and see her. Come!"

No," said Ethel, shrinking back. "You go, and I say, Philip, ask her to be more gentle to our mother. *You* can ask her."

She stood away from him and regarded him solemnly. It was for her a solemn moment. She had long dwelt upon the

unwelcome vagaries of her sister, and wondered why such extravagant wilfulness should be thrust at the patient gentleness of her mother. It was her great mystery, but although she brooded wearily over the tangled skein she had never spoken before to anyone upon the dreadful subject, and even now the appeal had come from her quite unawares. Her gentle spirit had often endured in silence and with amazement the sudden outbursts, but she stood aside at the torrent of passion, and let it pass unresisted and apparently unnoticed. She never even knew it pained her. She thought only of Dora and of her mother, and felt for them—for Dora because the dominant selfishness grew within her, and for her mother because her gentle spirit was being overborne and fretted for very fear, for both Ethel and her mother knew instinctively what trouble would come to a nature that nursed an inveterate and resistless wilfulness.

"You go, Philip," said Ethel; "go and talk with her."

Philip entered the studio as Dora was reducing the mangled clay to something like a human head.

"Ah, you've come at last, have you?" she said, working away at the ear of the figure. "This is not like you yet, Philip," she added, "but it's going to be. Why didn't you come before?"

"Busy," said Philip.

"Ah, that's good," said Dora, with a knowing shake of the head, a glance at her model, and quite a masterful sweep of the hand round the clay. "Always keep busy, eh? Keeps one out of mischief and free from the megrims."

The professional manner—conciliatory, patronising, encouraging—were exhibited by the young girl to perfection. The distinguished brother who had come to chide was as plastic to her tongue as was the clay to her hand. He sat down and resigned himself to the situation. He was amused, and felt inclined to laugh at the assumption of superiority exhibited by the vigorous Dora, but kept his humour to himself. The passion of the hour before was gone, and clean forgotten by him, along with the pain and anxiety of Ethel. The novelty of the relationship and Dora's surroundings, all new to him, were quite sufficient to dissipate more serious reflections and give new direction to a not too constant purpose.

"Hold up your head, please, a little," said Dora, standing in an attitude of authority and gravely studying the sitter's face.

"Suppose," she added, "you turn a little to the right and keep your eye on this Apollo. Fix on the tip of his nose."

Philip obeyed, and the artist nodded approval.

"You must understand, Phil," she added, "that the smaller the point you look at the more certain are you to retain always the same position."

A vigorous pounding of the clay followed this deliverance, and the concentration of his eye on the tip of the Apollo's nose gave Philip time to collect his thoughts. He sadly wanted to oblige Ethel and secure his mother's peace, but how was he to open up the subject with effect.

"May I talk?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, by all means, but keep your position," said Dora, working with energy.

"Yes, I'll keep my position," said Philip. "I have my eye right on the tip of the Apollo's nose, and the position is so monotonous that I propose to vary the conditions by asking you a question."

"Well, what is it?"

"Have you any idea why I came in here?"

"To oblige me, of course, and very good of you to do so."

"No," said Philip, "that was not the purpose."

"Well, it's the purpose now, and you are obliging me, but please don't look this way just now, as I want to get the turn of your neck. Keep your eye on Apollo, that's a good boy."

"I came to talk with you," said Philip, after a pause.

"That's right. Talk away."

"But I want to talk seriously."

"Not too seriously, I hope," was the answer, "because I can be serious about only one thing at a time."

"I want to talk about the mother."

"Eh?" said Dora, with a sudden look round. "That's not serious, Phil; but if it is, you must wait a bit, because I'm going to measure you."

With this she approached him with a pair of calipers. Wrenching them open, she put one leg on his forehead, took the distance to his chin, and marked it on the clay, then took the distance from the same place to his nostril, and then to the sweep of his ear. She marked them all with care, and every effort on his part to speak was silenced with an air of authority there was no resisting.

"Now, what about the mother?" she asked absently, as she worked the clay.

"She seems unhappy," said Philip.

"Think so?" asked Dora, with her head on one side, as she took an admiring view of her work.

"I'm sure of it."

"Ah, you're sure of it. What a queer chin you've got, Phil—quite unusual."

Was that unconscious indifference or wanton callousness? or was it rather that determined pursuit of a purpose which from its absorbing character approaches selfishness? Philip was unable to decide, and his thoughts reverted to the original subject.

"Yes," he said, after a pause, "I am sure of it; and I am sure also you could do much to prevent her unhappiness."

"Oh, you *are* queer," she answered, still working on the clay. "Why do you say such things?"

"Because they are true. Your remarks to-day pained her. She seemed to quiver as if your words had pierced her."

"Oh, no, I think not," said Dora, with nonchalance, as she gave a prod with her thumb in the eyeball of her figure and then gouged out a too prominent eye. "You're mistaken, Philip. You don't understand us. Mother and Ethel are always quiet and subdued. I'm always excited and violent. I know I am, and I like it. They're a little bit startled at me every now and then, but it doesn't matter, Philip. We jog along. We're all very fond of one another, and we never quarrel. Hold your head up!"

Philip obeyed. The Apollo's nose was becoming decidedly monotonous, still he obeyed, and considered what next he should say, as the sculptor continued working at the clay with a dexterity and energy that rather baffled his scheme of reproach. Her complete self-complacency weakened his resolution for attack. He doubted, but still he would make another effort.

"It would not be much trouble, Dora, would it," he asked, "to refrain from making violent speeches before your mother?"

"Perhaps not," she answered; "but there's the dressing-bell for dinner, and the Finnessmores are coming."

Philip sighed as she dashed from the studio without another word.

Obviously the conversation was embarrassing.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PARTY OF EIGHT.

MORRIS HERITAGE was a model host. It was not that he had a perfect cuisine and an admirable cellar, the most elegantly furnished table and the most unobtrusive service, for all these can be bought with money, even to purchasing the skill for selecting and the energy for directing these instruments of ornate gastronomy; but he seemed, without an effort, to make all the arrangements his own, and each of his guests felt not only safe in his hands but the object of his special regard, and there was no fuss.

The party of eight was made up of the Heritage family of five and the Finnessmore combination of three, and it was a party of sympathetic ambitions. It presented the usual difficulties in the matter of seating associated with all parties of an even number whose moieties are also even, but in the case of a gathering so resolutely bent on making itself agreeable this urgent matter was soon accommodated. Heritage, of course, conducted the Countess, and Finnessmore Muriel. The Lady Alice was of necessity left to Philip; but the difficulties of seating an even number whose moieties were also even separated him from the heiress of the Earl of Bolore, and he found himself next the Countess and opposite his future chief on the one hand and Lady Alice on the other, a commanding position, permitting him to join in conversation with all three guests, and, as he felt, subjecting himself at the same time to scrutiny and probation. But his anxieties on this account were reduced to small and almost insignificant proportions by the contemplation of more absorbing reflections. He discovered that the Lady Alice was a paragon of grace and beauty, a sylph, a thing of light and air, a veritable Peri, and he rejoiced that he could gaze upon her and dream of possibilities. The stern eye of Dora, however, was upon him, and he dissembled.

The Lady Alice was fair. Her skin was of pearly whiteness, save where the glow of health bedecked her cheek, and

her hair was like the flow of virgin silk, as fine in texture and as bright in colour. Her face was oval, and her large laughing brown eyes never ceased to sparkle and reflect her exuberant delight in life. It seemed impossible that her rosy lips could ever have been shaped for serious utterances, or that her heart, that beat so gently in its gossamer prison, should ever throb to deep emotion or awaken to the tumult of engrossing passion. She was free—to laugh, to sing, to rejoice—and all the burden of her life was how to enjoy to the very utmost limit every moment of every hour of each fleeting day, and how to clog the wheels of time and so increase the sum of every passing joy.

It was one of the pleasing delusions of the Right Hon. Peter Finnessmore that he had charge of this butterfly. In a sense he had. So also he could stand in the sunshine and breathe the ambient air, but to control the Lady Alice was beyond the capacity of the Right Honourable Peter. She followed her own sweet will.

Being on the best of terms with herself, and endowed with a considerate disposition, she was on excellent terms with everybody else. She recognised the difficulties of the table, and finding herself separated from her escort, gave Philip a nod and a smile, as if to intimate that although separated she kept him in remembrance, and began to flirt with his step-father with all the vigour her irrepressible spirit could supply. Said she:

"Uncle tells me Mr. Philip is going into politics. What fun he will have!"

"Is it very amusing?" asked Heritage.

"Immensely so. *I'm* a politician. At present my mother keeps me in the background, uses me as a sort of decoy for her party, but by-and-by I shall set to work on my own account." She shot a glance of rollicking defiance across the table at her mother as she said this, and then turning with a serious countenance to Heritage, she asked: "Now, don't you think it wrong, Mr. Heritage, for mamma to put me off with frivolous boys at her assemblies when we know there's a future before me?"

"Indeed?" queried Heritage.

"Yes," exclaimed the Lady Alice, "don't you know I've got a pocket borough—not the old sort that we read about, but one of a new pattern—and when I've arranged matters to suit the times I shall look out for a candidate and put him into the seat."

"Isn't she trying?" exclaimed the Countess, and then all three went on with their soup.

"How will you arrange your pocket borough?" asked Heritage in due time.

"I'll arrange it by everything that is not political, and regulate the votes of the people by mothers' meetings, reading-rooms, assemblies, and lectures—'On the Ichthyosaurus,' for instance. Magic lanterns and dissolving views, of course, when the ichthyosaurus comes on."

"How will the ichthyosaurus help you?" asked Heritage, as much amused by the irritation of the Countess as by the energy of her daughter.

"Help me! Why, of course, it will! They'll like my ichthyosaurus, and therefore they'll like my politics."

"Isn't she dreadfully trying, Mr. Heritage?" sighed the Countess.

"Mamma doesn't believe in my way. She thinks people reason about politics. A few do, but the rest don't. I'm going to clothe their ideas in warm blankets in winter, and air them by picnics in summer, because, Mr. Heritage, I'm a politician. Mr. Philip, you agree with me. If you don't now, you will soon."

Philip was sure he would, and said so, and the Lady Alice turned her head and laughed. She liked to tease her mother on matters political. "Mother thinks she knows so much about it, you know, my dear, but she is quite mistaken," she would say, and in this filial criticism she followed the manners of many older politicians with glib tongues and reckless assurance.

The conversation drifted into the ordinary channels—the operatic season which had been a failure, the drama which was awakening to new life, the latest trial which was scandalous and foul beyond description, but being a trial, the filth had become ordinary. The Countess began it, but Muriel and Heritage exchanged glances and talked of the weather. The dinner passed, and Finnessmore found himself alone with Heritage, his host, and Philip, his new secretary elect.

"This meeting, my dear fellow," said Finnessmore, "is most opportune. I am not only able to make the acquaintance of my friend Philip, but I am able to ask your advice, and, I hope, secure your co-operation in a matter of great importance to all of us—especially to me."

Having by this very impressive exordium attracted the

attention of Heritage, the Right Hon. Peter leant back in his chair, cleared his throat, and balanced a dessert fork on his forefinger. Then, turning suddenly on his friend, he added:

"There's a great movement on foot in which the commercial life of the country is blending with the political—I may say the Imperial. Africa, my dear Heritage, is being developed, particularly South Africa, and I have been approached in the matter from the City."

Heritage smiled. He took a sip of port, and waited.

"I was the whole of yesterday, and a great portion of this afternoon, going over the details of a remarkable enterprise—the development of the mineral wealth of South Africa, in which I am asked to take a prominent position."

Heritage still remained silent, after giving utterance to a dubious or inquiring "Yes," and followed the monosyllable by another sip of port, obviously with the air of a man who had suspicions of an unwelcome proposition in the immediate future. Finnessmore scaled the icy rampart with determination. Said he:

"Heritage, my dear fellow, South Africa needs developing in the interests of our growing populations—I say populations, for some of our older colonies are getting crowded in parts, and South Africa is a marvellous country."

Finnessmore felt a little unstable, but was still daring.

"Is it gold or diamonds?" asked Heritage.

"Neither!" exclaimed Finnessmore with glee, grasping his friend's wrist in the enthusiasm of the moment. "Neither of these, but copper—common-place copper—the metal of the housewife and the plumber and the gasfitter—the utilitarian's metal—the metal in universal demand—the metal that is used for ornament, for cooking, for pipes, for coins, for everything. I find there is a mountain of it in the undeveloped province of Obooboo, called by our pioneers the Great Coradell, and I am invited to join in developing it. Now, Heritage," he added, with an insinuating smile, "you must join me in this!"

Heritage withdrew his arm from the grasp of Finnessmore with deliberation, settled the decanters in a row in front of him with precision, touched them tenderly, as if they had something to do with the subject, and then, leaning back in his chair, with an expression of unusual gravity on his face, he asked:

"How?"

Philip looked on with growing interest and excitement.

It was his introduction to the serious business of life. It was as if a curtain had been lifted from some elaborate mechanism whose existence had never been imagined by him; and he was dazzled by the reflection that he, and his university colleagues in the cultivation of egotism, had never thought of a condition of things so commonplace and so natural as a statesman dabbling in commerce and a commercial man being invited to further a State purpose. He was elated.

The question "How?" uttered from behind a hedge bristling with repellent thorns, and accompanied with that suggestion of a frown common with bankers and capitalists in cases where confidence is not absolute, brought Finnessmore up to his work with redoubled energy. This "How?" which obviously meant "No how," would have abashed a less resolute assailant, but to Finnessmore it was a rung on the ladder upon which he could stand firmly and go up from. Said he:

"I am asked to be a director of the company—not the chairman—Lord Maladore is that, and I want you to join with me."

Finnessmore felt he had thrown his dice on the table, and experienced the sensations of a short-sighted man unable to count the pips. Heritage went through the process of arranging the decanters, and when he had settled them, abstractedly touching each of them in turn, he again set himself back in his chair and delivered himself with a dubious shaking of the head:

"It would be a serious departure from the leading rule of my commercial life," said he, "and of that of my uncle before me, if I associated myself with the promoters of a company. Our house has never done so."

"But this is a remarkably safe affair," said Finnessmore. "I have examined it in every detail. I have had Howler with me for four hours. It's in Howler's hands!"

This last exclamation was shot at Heritage with accumulated energy, in the hope that it would check the solemn head-shaking that seemed likely to grow in vigour.

"I'm not questioning the soundness of the enterprise," said Heritage, with another touch of the decanters, "and no doubt Howler has a position, but I am stating a principle. We have never identified ourselves with the management of a company."

"Then allow me to say," said Finnessmore, brightening up, "that it's about time you made an exception to that rule, because joint-stock company enterprise is rapidly becoming the only outlet for capital."

Heritage lifted his hand deprecatingly as he replied:

"Say rather that it is rapidly being diverted from the purpose for which it was designed to purposes of legalised larceny. But how do you reconcile your position as a member of the Government with that of a promoter of companies?"

"Very simply. I've nothing to do with the Colonial Office, and therefore do not lend the weight of office to the company. On the other hand, the development of the colonies, and especially South Africa, is a part of the Government's policy, and I use my position as a private citizen to further an object approved by the Government to which I happen to belong."

"Theoretically you are sound, but in practice these operations are essentially unsound," said Heritage. "The Companies Acts have been perverted to the basest uses. They have in effect taken the place in the public mind of the forbidden lotteries and roulette tables, and are so far discreditable that every genuine enterprise is handicapped by the deceptions practised in company promoting."

"And that," said Finnessmore triumphantly, "is the very reason I contend you should abandon your exclusive policy and co-operate in enterprises of national interest. Now look at the position," he continued, observing the excitement of the ingenuous Philip. "Here's your stepson. Why shouldn't he join if you will not? He will answer every purpose, without compromising your house. He will have plenty of time, and will be in a position to look after my interests, and have the benefit of your guidance. Now, there can be no objection to that."

Heritage wavered, and Philip struck in with enthusiasm:

"That would be delightful. I should enjoy it immensely."

Heritage shook his head and smiled. It was not a resolute shake; and it was a generous and gratified smile.

"I'm afraid, Philip," he said, "you have little conception of the quicksands you would sail near, of the pirates you would consort with, of the sharks who would open their capacious jaws at your approach."

"He must learn," said Finnessmore, "and I can assure you that this affair is not only good in itself, but his conjunction with me in connection with it would be an immense personal service to me—immense!"

Heritage weakened fast. He tapped the knuckles of his left hand with the fingers of his right—the shaking of his head was less pronounced.

'To do you a service, Finnessmore," said he, "is the greatest inducement I could have in this connection to comply with your suggestion, but you ask me to take a very serious step. I have been, and still am, desirous of keeping Philip away from the atmosphere of the City, at least until his experience would enable him to distinguish between the honourable and dishonourable. Commercial morality, as you know, is in the lowest possible state. Men do things without a blush that can in no way be distinguished from petty larceny, except that the amounts appropriated are larger and the manner of appropriation is different."

"Yes, Heritage," said Finnessmore, smiling and putting his hand upon Heritage's. "You are quite right. It is because we know this, and because I want assistance to cope with any blacklegs that may come along, that I desire Philip's co-operation. You know, Heritage, if we had more honourable men in joint-stock enterprises we should have less to complain of."

"Yes," said Heritage, "perhaps you are right in that. Perhaps the indolence of the better sort is the cause of the ascendency of the sharpers. You would like to do this, I suppose, Philip?" he asked.

"Oh, very much so," said Philip.

"Well," said Heritage somewhat sadly, "perhaps you had better go through the speculative measles young and under guidance; and, as you wish it, make your own arrangements with your chief, and don't discuss the matter with me until everything is settled."

Philip grasped his stepfather's hand with delight, and thanked him with enthusiasm.

Turning to Finnessmore, Heritage added:

"Of course you understand, Finnessmore, that you both act on your own responsibility. I am simply Philip's bondsman financially. Let's go to the drawing-room."

This had been a great day for Philip. Politics, commerce, love had all been opened up to him within twelve hours, and in circumstances that to him were fascinating to the verge of delirium. How could he manage to respond to these demands upon his energies and emotions? He clenched his hands and braced himself for a great effort. He must succeed in all.

The Right Hon. Peter was also elated, but there was no tumult in his case. His emotions were well in hand. A suc-

cessful manœuvre such as that which he had been engaged in steadied him and made him quiet. He settled himself with a sense of restfulness in his easy-chair that night. He had marked "one," and he reflected on the consequences with complacency. He would mark "two" within twenty-four hours.

The Right Hon. Peter had not been as successful in life as he felt he was entitled to be. Socially, politically, commercially he had been always very near the mark, but somehow he had always missed it. His misery was added to by the fear and almost certain knowledge that the entire population of his small world knew he was a failure. He saw sneers in their nods, and condemnation in their "How d'e do?" He examined the Court Circular and the list of visitors at dinner parties with avidity; and his misery was complete when an appointment he coveted was given to another. And what appointments did he not covet?

There is no appetite so voracious as that which desires ascendency in social position in a highly civilised state. It is essentially one of those appetites that grows in proportion as it is gratified; nothing can appease it, and its cravings have never yet met with the obstacle of repletion. An ordinary jog-trot person—your country squire, whose talk is of beeves, would be amazed if he could comprehend the terrible anxieties of a man of Finnessmore's temperament and purposes. Few have any conception of the amount of irritation and even suffering that such men endure as the fruits of unsatisfied ambition. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the anguish is wholly useless for any purpose of real gratification or solid gain in the shape of comfort and of that repose, which men, throughout the whole of their restless, unsatisfied lives are always striving for, but seldom achieve. Moralists, cynics, and philosophers review the sphere of human desires, and utilitarians calculate the advantages of civilisation as a means of happiness in comparison with the circumstance of those lives, whose delights consist in a bunch of bananas and continuous basking in the sunshine; but the problem remains unsolved, for the holder of a dukedom who has achieved every possible Order is often less happy than the ploughman who is gratified with the conventional piece of bread and pork carved by his clasp-knife as he sits on a five-barred gate in the fields.

The mystery, however, is a mystery only in respect of the individual. The restless eagerness, the unachieved ambition,

the constant unsuccessful striving of all men for a success that may be mean and selfish, and even despicable, and that should provoke only regret for the man, yet contribute here and there in the movements of the world to a real achievement and a real accession to the sum of the world's wealth of knowledge. What matters it if the multitude gain and a self-seeking schemer fails to reap as he desired?

How much of this gain would come to the world from the floating of the Great Coradell (despite the quagmire of deceit and avarice upon which it would be founded) remains to be seen.

. . . . . .

There was a meeting next morning between Finnessmore and Howler. Certain undertakings were mutually exchanged. Certain figures were put on the back of visiting cards. Certain arrangements were made, and bound by no stronger threads than self-interest and the opportunity, in the event of failure, of these two interesting persons being able the one to call the other "liar" or "rascal" under his breath—weak bindings in a sense, but strong as chain cables in many cases.

"You see," said Finnessmore, in the course of this interview, "what I can get for you is the support of the house of Heritage by the adhesion as a director of a close connection of the house. I have arranged it, Howler; and I leave myself in your hands. When you have put me right I will declare."

The Right Hon. Peter did not hesitate to traffic with that rare and priceless treasure the generosity of a friend.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BOWDLER GARDEN PARTY.

It was generally acknowledged that the Countess had managed matters wonderfully well. The difficulties in the way were enormous, but they were all surmounted in the most natural manner. The Prime Minister had had at least three minutes conversation with Bowdler, who was introduced to him by Delfoy; and it was held that Bowdler was certainly in the way of being conciliated, for he had actually smiled in the course of the conversation, and had afterwards expressed himself as pleased with the compliment comprised in an invitation to a garden party honoured by a prince of the blood and by the first minister of the Crown.

The Prince, who had a keen appreciation of the influence of the monarchical institution on the radical mind when associated with a personality, took it into his diplomatic head to talk to Bowdler himself, and Finnessmore was called upon to present him. The Right Hon. Peter was nervous and excited, but Bowdler assumed a dignified strut, and was a model of reserve and deference. The Prince put on his cheeriest manner, and seemed as much pleased as if Bowdler had been a highly accomplished conjurer, a Patagonian high priest, or some similar human novelty. As a matter of fact Bowdler was a much more important personage in the eyes of the Prince than anybody else in the garden. Of course he did not say so, and there was much speculation among the political wirepullers as to whether the Prince had acted on his own initiative or had been prompted by a cabinet minister. Some more than ordinarily imaginative person concocted the fiction of a special cabinet council to consider the question whether the consequences of the Prince saying, "Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Bowdler," should be faced in the presence of grave public questions connected with the rights of labour; and the correspondent of a New York newspaper, who had selected as his missions in life the reconciliation of abject snobbery with Spread Eagle Republicanism and the elevation of per-

sonal journalism to the position of a fine art, reported his own conversation with every prominent guest on this most important public question, and unhesitatingly concluded that democracy was in the ascendant, and would in the immediate future possess the land to the exclusion of the titled aristocracy. He pictured in glowing language the early prospect of the triumphant Bowdler carrying all before him; and hoped and believed he would soon see Bowdler standing with his heel upon the neck of the prostrate prince, while he waved the flag of freedom aloft in the face of a triumphant people. The less imaginative and more decorous among the company remarked the incident with suppressed enthusiasm, and had much difficulty in pretending they were not intently watching what was going on.

Finnessmore retired apart after making the presentation with a glow of thankfulness suffusing his entire being. He experienced something in the shape of a spiritual ecstasy; but the idol before whom he bowed in rapturous thankfulness was his own cleverness. It was indeed a great triumph to cap Delfoy's introduction of Bowdler to polite society by bringing him within the circle of royalty itself; and surely now Finnessmore would be justified in the eyes of his sister notwithstanding the Duchess hadn't come. He promised himself the pleasure of offering her a delightful revenge by enabling her to announce on an early day that the coveted secretaryship had been conferred on a rival to the Duchess's nominee; and, best of all, he saw plainly that no one else could now claim the credit of having "handled Bowdler."

But there was one group very near the Prince at the time he was talking with Bowdler that had emotions of its own to contend with. It was the Countess's own party, the family group associated with the Lady Alice, that stood in the background as the Countess did the honours. Philip was there, and Dora and Ethel; and Muriel on guard—always on guard, but more than usually on guard this day. She had at first refused to come, but Philip urged her. She knew that the most likely of all things to happen to her that day was the one thing of all others she most dreaded; but the constant wearing of the nerves, in fear of an unrealised but inevitable catastrophe, had produced a sudden hardening of her nature—an artificial stubbornness. Something of the sullen courage of the martyr had found place within her, and she stood among the crowd unmoved by any of the incidents of common concern going on around her. She had come to dare.

The movement was incessant. To and fro they passed, surging up to the corner where the hostess stood for the time being; and receding, carried with them, under cover of their smiles, the several passions that controlled them.

Some wished they had not come because their reception had not been sufficiently enthusiastic; and others were only too glad to bask, solitary and at a distance, in the social sunshine that dazzled their plebeian souls. Some felt bored and left immediately they had arrived; while others came at the beginning and resolved to stay to the end. Some busy men found the necessary time from among their professional engagements and regarded the visit as an advertisement; while others of no occupation regarded the function as a godsend for using up half a day. Some were angry because they were obliged to be civil to other people they disliked; and a few, whose object was political, treated the affair as a serious matter of business, and were appropriately grave. The reformed cannibal confessed to his interpreter that he was not amused, and wanted a big drum.

The Lady Alice had her demi-court. A pink young man with a lisp, a sunbrown major with one arm, a languid Foreign Office clerk, a returned colonial governor, an Indian judge on leave—these and many others of the non-political and immaterial contingent hovered about her as long as they dared, filling up odd corners and making way as circumstances required for the more distinguished. They deployed around as a background of dull but eminently respectable mediocrity devoted to setting off genius, statesmanship, novelty, and the various excellences, virtues, and charms of a distinguished London gathering. They were, in some cases, the objects of envy for being so near the fountain-head of the day's glory; in others they were pitied for being so incapable of playing the part their position demanded. Still, everybody smiled, and Bowdler was captivated if not captured.

Everyone was dying to know what the Prince said to make Bowdler laugh, and what Bowdler said that made the Prince laugh; and a good many people were annoyed to find Bowdler so much at his ease, and others were annoyed that the Prince should have taken the trouble to put him at his ease, as if the Prince could alter the habit of his life, or as if he didn't understand his own business best. It was when this matter of profound and general concern was absorbing almost universal attention that Muriel, still on guard, saw her husband approach-

ing in conversation with a companion, slowly and decorously, but, although slowly, with intent. Barring obstacles they came in a bee-line towards her, and she knew that the other was Geoffrey Delfoy.

She looked hastily to the right, where Philip was talking with the Lady Alice, oblivious of everything but her gauzy presence, and supremely happy in the blind confidence of a new and growing hope. Muriel shuddered at the sight. Still the two figures continued to approach, still talking, and she could see that Geoffrey was looking much older and sterner, more resolute and colder.

"How do they know each other?" she asked herself. "Morris has never mentioned the other's name."

The situation grew in intensity as they approached, and the suspense was terrible. The Prince laughed, and Bowdler bowed; Philip glowed with enthusiasm, and the Lady Alice flirted with charming impartiality; the entire company moved about like listless bees who had given up making honey; and the two figures came nearer, nearer, as listlessly as the rest. Presently "the other one" stopped, straightened himself, and looked towards Bowdler. He made a remark, accompanied with a sardonic smile.

"Bowdler is evidently making himself amusing," said he. "He'll be quite tame after this."

Then he glanced to where the Prime Minister was taking leave of Lady Bolore, and was languidly turning to Heritage when he saw Muriel, boldly erect, with her eyes fixed on him and with defiance. Delfoy's face blanched, his features seemed suddenly to become flattened and expressionless, all but his lower lip seemed to be obliterated, and that projected further than usual and trembled. He looked upon the ground, and was slower in his walk than hitherto. Then he raised his head and looked again, this time with the eyes half closed, as if to shield them and to shield his barren heart. Now they had come quite close, and Heritage was saying in his pleasant gracious way:

"Delfoy: my wife. My dear: one of my old-time friends."

They were bowing—bowing low. Muriel did not hold out her hand, and Delfoy recovering, said:

"Your husband, Mrs Heritage, was very intimate with my family in our youth. It is very pleasing to renew old friendships in new and agreeable circumstances."

Muriel bowed again. She did not dare to speak, not even

A Formal Introduction.

to say she was unwell, and Delfoy went on slowly and indifferently:

"It must be eighteen years at least, Heritage, since last we met. It seems odd that we should have been so long separated."

The remark applied to either case, as he intended it should; and amazement acted like a tonic to Muriel as he continued in lackadaisical accents:

"I have almost regretted the circumstances that sent us in different directions, but we appear to have made the best of them; and I hope we shall not lose sight of each other in future."

"I hope so too," said Heritage, "and I must introduce Philip to you as you have been so good as to promise to look after him."

As Heritage moved aside to wrest his stepson from the delightful tutelage of the Lady Alice, Delfoy lifted his eyebrows and asked:

"Were you ever in Nice, Mrs. Heritage?

"No," was the faint reply.

"Ah, singular. You remind me of a lady I met there once. Indeed when I first saw you I thought you were the very same, but it is obvious we have never met before."

"No. Never—before."

The words came with a deep-drawn, welling sigh that was almost a sob—a sob of relief, of bewilderment, of deliverance.

Philip came up, and they were all busy over the introduction, in which she naturally avoided taking any part. During the ceremony she heard Delfoy say with a composure that amazed her far more than the words he used:

"Your father tells me you're going to be private secretary to my friend Finnessmore. I'm very glad to hear it. Capital opportunity for you. If I can be of any service to you at any time don't fail to come to me."

He spoke pleasantly, openly, and quite without concern; and as he left them shortly afterwards he cast his eyes around languidly and said to himself as he moved away:

"And those are the girls. A strange world—very strange."

CHAPTER XXIX.

CITY MATTERS.

We are accustomed in a general way to regard "the City" as a hard place, where people make hard bargains and settle them in hard cash; where a man's word is supposed to be his bond, to be rigidly exacted, and if broken, never to be mended throughout all time. And so it is in a general way, and especially when the strong bargain with the weak, and where there is any individual wrenching and squeezing to be done; but every now and then a time comes upon the City when the frenzy of hysteria pervades everybody in it, and when everything hard seems to become soft, invertebrate, and infantile.

It was one of these times when the great Coradell Mine came out, for these times are of two kinds—they supervene upon misfortune and they grow out of prosperity. There is a panic of expectation as well as a panic of fear, a determination to put one's neck into the halter as well as a determination to avoid it. The Great Coradell was issued in a season of hope. It came upon the City in circumstances that excited the gambling instinct to frenzy; and it became a struggle and a race as to who should participate in this very "good thing."

The prospectus had been drawn with consummate skill. Studied moderation had obviously been the ruling principle of its draughtsman. No exaggerated pretensions were put forward, and as a crowning evidence of the *bonâ fides* of the enterprise it was announced that the directors and their personal friends had made application for one-fourth of the whole capital. And who were the directors? The interesting fact of their abounding confidence naturally directed attention to the personal question, and the personal question was beyond criticism. The Marquis of Maladore was at least a marquis, and the German baron of Anglo-Dutch extraction and with a South African address, inspired confidence because he was unknown and was generally supposed to have lived on the Great Coradell. Mr. Flaire had been about the City for some

years, and so had Mr. Gowcher. These two were regarded as fortunate fellows, and people wondered how they got into so good a thing. In the secret recesses of their heart they themselves wondered why they hadn't been got rid of as the board rose in character, and concluded there was a reason for that as for most other things. The disappointed company promoter having a tongue to speak and eyes to wink and a head to shake can do a deal of injury to an embryo enterprise if he goes about the City wagging that tongue and winking those eyes and shaking that head now and again at odd intervals, even though he says, winks, and shakes nothing out that anyone can take hold of. Indeed the more indefinite and more mysterious the wagging and winking the greater the damage. So Flaire and Gowcher remained to welcome the Right Honourable Peter and Philip Heritage, and a most deferential welcome it was.

The adhesion of a member of the Government and of a connection of the great house of Heritage, that had never been known since its foundation to have anything to do with the floating of joint-stock companies, was a great fact. Being so extraordinary and startling a breach of precedent, the fact had been put about, surreptitiously as it were, and as a rare "tip" to be treasured in confidence, to be used with discretion, and operated on with future profit. The name of his stepfather's firm did not follow Philip's name on the prospectus, but his stepfather's private address did. And the astute Peter discovered a reason, wholly political and departmental, why Philip should not be publicly announced to be his private secretary until after the lapse of five weeks, so that Philip's name on the Great Coradell board should be conclusively exhibited as a Heritage connection and not as a Finnessmore. He so contrived, indeed, that it should be obvious to the meanest perceptions that Philip became the Right Hon. Peter's private secretary because he was a director of the Great Coradell, and would never have been thought of in that capacity but for this striking departure of the house of Heritage from established precedent. It was all very well done, and the rush for shares was so great that every man connected with the floating of the company actually believed that he had stumbled on a good thing without in the least intending it, so utterly indifferent are gentry of this sort as to whether the goods they offer to a confiding public are good or bad so long as they look well.

On the morning of the issue the City was attacked by an

epidemic. The bank that had the good fortune to receive the subscriptions—the Consolidated Bank of the Cape of Good Hope—was besieged by an eager crowd before its doors were opened; and all day long its ordinary business was reduced to the narrowest possible limits short of complete suspension, while the British investor poured his savings into the Great Coradell. The wealthier subscriber of course posted his application and his cheque, and those who invaded the doors may be regarded as belonging to that class commonly described as the "widow and the orphan," including as it does all those who, being of comparatively small means, ask unusually large interest, and fight wildly to compass this much desired return, regardless of the security. That is universally acknowledged to be the habit of the "widow and the orphan." They want more to eat and drink, and this is one of the ways they try to get it.

Thus the Consolidated Bank of the Cape of Good Hope was quite crowded, and the investors continued to crowd. Many of them came attracted by the name of the bank. To be "consolidated" is to be solid they argued; and to be of Good Hope was exactly their condition of mind. The "Cape" was thrown in as landed property, or disregarded according to the temperament of the intending investor; but the very name of the bank turned the balance of "aye" or "no" in many minds, and these, with the rest, pressed to the counter.

On the outskirts of this eager crowd were a couple of apparently indifferent investors—two men who seemed to be endowed with more than the ordinary patience of men in general when kept waiting, and perfect marvels of nonchalance when considered on the standard of men desirous of being "in a good thing." They were phenomenal for indifference. One of them was a slim man, inclined to a sporting habit, in a checkered suit, with a low-crowned hat, and carrying a riding cane. He answered to the name of Shout, and addressed his friend as Vickers. Vickers was a large man, wearing a buttoned frock coat and a tall hat with a curved brim. He was one of those men you never hoped in any circumstances to see clean, because you knew you would be disappointed. The starch in his shirt cuffs and collars made away with itself immediately it came in contact with him, and gave up the linen to hopeless contamination. His eyes were bleary, his nose was large and inclined to red. His hair was lank and iron-grey, never to be white in any circumstances, and his voice thick but pretentious. He was the father of Laura.

Shout gave his companion a nudge, and directed his attention to a man who had just arrived in hot haste and was wiping his forehead as he regained his breath. Having done this, he looked about him to see in what way he could supplant his predecessors. Shout's attention had been attracted by the man's costume. He was evidently a butcher, and in full dress, with a silk hat, a blue jean frock coat, white sleevelets and white apron, and with a ponderous steel slung from a leathern girdle loosely encircling his waist. Observing him, one instinctively looked round for the block and the chopper, and the volatile Shout seemed amused at the sight of a butcher in full dress in a City bank. Being an exceedingly quick man, he had noticed Shout's proceedings, and being a choleric man he resented them.

"Sir, to you," said the butcher, with a defiant look at Shout. "Have you anything to complain of?"

"Nothing to complain of," answered Shout, with a bow from which mockery was not absent.

"Then don't look as if you had." And bridling up, the man continued, with pouting lips and inflated cheeks : "I suppose there's nothing criminal in a tradesman going outside his shop in his tradesman's dress? I suppose I am at liberty to step out on a little matter of special business and step back home again to continue my ordinary business without your coming your jeers and your jibes?"

"I offered neither jeer nor jibe, Mr. Tradesman," said Shout, with another bow in which mockery was distinctly present.

"My name ain't 'Tradesman,' it's Joy, and I'm not ashamed of it, nor of my trade; neither of one nor all of my trades, any more than the gentleman in broadcloth is ashamed to eat what I provide, whether it's from the bakery, or the grocery, or the porkshop. And I've a right to come here as well as another and make my application and lodge my cash without your jeers or jibes, spoken or acted."

"My dear fellow," began Shout apologetically, when he was cut short by another outburst :

"Don't 'dear fellow' me, 'cause I ain't your 'dear fellow,' nor nobody else's 'dear fellow' except my missis's, and I don't want to be neither dear nor cheap to you, and I should recommend you to keep a civil tongue in your head."

This was rather hard on Shout, who, whatever was in his mind, had not used a single word that anyone could take ex-

ception to on the ground of politeness; but as the butcher's voice was none of the softest, and his bearing none of the mildest, the altercation called for the intervention of the bank porter, whose green coat and brass buttons commanded respect. The storm, however, was not allayed in a moment, and the irate butcher wanted to know why one tradesman should be allowed to go about in the dress of his trade without remark and another should not. "What about your clergyman, I should like to know? Doesn't he go about in his black clothes, with a button-up waistcoat and a round collar and a low-crowned wideawake? Do you jeer and jibe at 'im?" This question was shot over the bank porter's shoulder at Shout, who still exhibited signs of simulated politeness, in the shape of appreciative nods and a blank expression of countenance expressive of an obtrusively earnest desire to understand the pork-butcher and do him justice.

"Oh dear no," said Shout; "we jeer and jibe at nobody—nobody. Do we, Vickers?"

The stout man held up his hand deprecatingly and shook his head, whispering: "Nobody. This is a bank!"

Upon which the pork-butcher moved aside, muttering he should think it was, and that it was not likely to be anything else, and that if it was anything else it wasn't likely he would be there on such an errand; and thus reflecting with looks of defiance at Shout he backed in among the crowd, and by dint of vigorous elbowing he managed to get near the counter before a good many others who had precedence of him, and found a man in a new suit of corduroy trousers and a grey jacket, who gave the name of Littercan, subscribing a good round sum because he knew Mr. Heritage, and because, as he confided to the clerk at the counter, "he had considered of him and knew of him to be a real gentleman, as was true to the backbone."

And in suchwise the Great Coradell was over-subscribed, and went to a premium, and was sold and re-sold with loss and gain, with rejoicings and regrets that the sellers hadn't sold before or the buyers hadn't bought before, or that the several persons concerned had or had not done something that they might have done or left undone, as is the manner of persons who flounder vacuously in the barren plains of what might have been if something else hadn't happened.

On the day of allotment, which was also the day of the division of the spoil, the Marquis was jubilant, and shook hands with Mr. Gowcher without a qualm—without even

noticing what he had done; and Mr. Flaire considered his reputation as a City man was established for all time; Mr. Alister talked no more of pyrites, but of gold; the German baron of Anglo-Dutch extraction accepted the position without emotion, and in this respect he was matched by Finnessmore. Philip was amazed.

No time was lost in transferring the contributions of the British investor to the Great Coradell Company to their ultimate destination, and in due course it happened that the claims of Mr Shad the vendor had to be considered. An appointment was made in the cavernous office of Messrs. Huckle & Broil, and the persons psesent were Mr. Huckle, standing before the fire, grim and angular, with Mr. Trip at a side-table, biting his nails and screwing up his eyes; and Mr. Shad, Mr. Trip's client, sitting apologetically on a chair, but withal presenting in his manner much the appearance of a stoat or ferret, and quite ready to take a grip, in passing, at anything or anybody that could be laid hold of unobserved.

"Now Mr. Shad," said Huckle, hauling his coat tails as high up his back as he could, "we've had a good run, and now it's your turn."

"Yes," said Shad, and waited.

"I'm the solicitor for the company, you know, Mr. Shad," said Huckle somewhat inconsequently, "but I happen to know that the secretary has handed to Mr. Trip, your solicitor, a cheque in which you will participate."

"Yes," said Shad. "How much?"

"A fairish amount," said Huckle; "but you have to pay certain claims upon you for the property you have sold, you know; and you take the balance after paying them."

"Yes," said Shad, blinking over his knuckles.

"Well, Mr. Shad," said Huckle in tones of triumph, "we've got your five hundred pounds all snug in your solicitor's hands, and he'll pay it over now in my presence."

"I want more than that," said Shad doggedly. "I must have more than that." But he made no movement; there was only a voice.

"Good!" exclaimed Huckle. "Give me your hand, Mr. Shad. Capital! I knew you'd say that. Didn't I say so, Trip? Capital! Of course you'll have more than that. You shall have a cool thousand, Mr. Shad, and Mr. Trip has got it for you."

"Not more?" asked Shad in the same dull tone.

"Well, my friend," said Huckle in a tone of remonstrance, "it's double the bargain, but I've something else to say."

"Yes."

"The affair has gone off very well up to now. Things often do go off well, but after going off well they drop a little. They must drop. They're bound to drop because they go up so high. We can't help that, Mr. Shad," continued Huckle hurriedly, as if he expected Shad to complain. "That's the way of things. So we must expect a drop in Great Coradells; and then things won't be so rosy all round as they are now. Besides this, it will take a year or two to work the business, and during all that time there'll be no dividend, and that will make another drop in Great Coradells, and things instead of looking rosy all round will look black all round. Do you see, Mr. Shad?" asked Huckle, coming suddenly to a full stop.

Shad nodded.

"Now then," continued Huckle, dropping his coat tails and bringing his hands into play, "we now come to the important point. When people don't get dividends, and when the shares they've paid a premium for are offered at a discount, they begin to think of the vendor, and they say, 'Where's that rascal?'"

Shad gave a start.

"They do, Mr. Shad," exclaimed Huckle, stretching out his hands as if he would suppress his hearer's emotion. "That's what they say, and they can't help it. They know nothing about it—nothing about anything, and they say, most unjustly and erroneously, 'Where's that rascal?' Now my experience is and always has been, Mr. Shad, that the wise vendor is not in the way when that question is asked. He has usually gone on a journey. The foolish vendor hangs about, but the wise one doesn't."

The lawyer took to searching for his coat tails again, and ceased speaking. The silence was broken by Mr. Trip.

"I observe," said he, addressing Mr. Huckle as if he were seeking information, "that you don't advise Mr. Shad to go away."

"Oh dear no," exclaimed Huckle, "I advise nothing. I merely state facts; and between you and me, Mr. Trip, the matter doesn't concern me, but it must be obvious to you that if it were my case, Mr. Trip, I should travel."

"Ah," said Trip, "so should I," and then screwing up his eyes much more, and still addressing himself to Huckle, without any apparent reference to Shad, he said: "And now suppose I

had a client who was a vendor, and who had sold his property and had got the cash, what would you advise me to advise him?"

"Well," said Huckle, with his hands very high up under his coat tails, and his frowning face severely regarding the ground, "I don't know, Mr. Trip, that I would go even as far as advising you what advice to give; and I don't know that I would go as far as advising you to give any advice at all. It seems to me, Mr. Trip, that in such a case the vendor should act wholly on his own responsibility, and then ask advice afterwards if he wants it—if, you know, for instance, anyone wants to know why he did as he did, which if he wasn't round about to be questioned would never happen. A man on the other side of the Rockies, for instance, is difficult to get at."

There was silence again for a moment or two, and then Shad broke out with:

"Make it two thousand and I'll go."

On which Huckle looked up with surprise and exclaimed:

"I can't 'make' it anything, Mr. Shad. The sum is made—you made it, and it is yours. Mr. Trip may manage something more for you; I cannot. Really you mustn't talk of 'making' it anything."

The lawyer looked quite distressed at the suggestion, and continued by urging Mr. Shad to make an effort not to be unreasonable.

"I see how it is," said Shad, suddenly rising from his chair, "I see." He swung his right clenched hand round and caught it in his left palm, and then threw it away again in his nervous excitement, as if it had been the thought that annoyed him. "I see; you want to get me out of the way. I say again: make it two thousand and I'll go. You shall see me no more." And saying this he lowered at them.

"Now, there again," said Huckle, "how wrong you are, Mr. Shad. We don't want to get you out of the way. I'm quite sure Mr. Trip doesn't. He makes money out of such a client as you. Mr. Trip doesn't want to throw away money. I don't want to get rid of you. Surely not. When a man excites my interest and—er—admiration I like him to stay with me, and when, as in your case, he comes through a large transaction with a nice little lot of money, why, I like to see him—keep it."

"But is it fair?" asked Shad plaintively.

"Fair, Mr. Shad? Fair? What is fair and unfair to us?"

asked Huckle, moving from the fireplace to his seat. "What have we to do with fair or unfair—Mr. Trip or me?"

"Is it honourable?" asked Shad excitedly, again striking his right fist into his left palm to relieve himself.

"Now, there again," said Huckle, "what have we to do with honourable or dishonourable? Nothing. We have to do with law and with fact, nothing else; and law and fact are two ugly customers to deal with when they are against you. Wise men, Mr. Shad, don't stop to be knocked about by them; they get out of their reach, especially if they have anything to lose."

So saying Mr. Huckle turned to his letters and papers, and thrust his right shoulder round so as to present as much of his back as possible to the unfortunate Shad, who was gradually repelled by the shoulder, and edged himself away in the direction of Mr. Trip, by whom he was carried off, and finally disposed of as if by a sympathetic friend and protector, whose virtues and gentleness shone prodigiously against the harsh background of the uncompromising Huckle.

It was casually announced during the following week that Mr. Shad, the vendor of the Great Coradell, had gone to San Francisco to conduct an exploration party of large dimensions in that interesting region.

CHAPTER XXX.

A BUSY DAY.

A MAN may not be a hero to his valet, but he is sometimes a deity, and often a precious charge. The sight of Dubley preparing to enter Delfoy's bedroom in the morning exhibited a devotion it would be hard to match. Delfoy's morning draught was rum and warm milk, and Dubley prepared it himself on a gas stove in a little room, where the exact heat of the milk was determined by a thermometer and the exact quantity of rum was measured by Dubley with the precision of a chemist. The brushed clothes were there, the varnished boots were there, the morning letters were there, *The Times* was there, cut and aired, and Dubley pointed at each of them in turn, reciting in the form of an incantation the morning inventory of the things that were wanted. He then put the letters and the rum and milk on a small salver, and approached the bedroom door with absolute silence. Opening the door, he entered with the caution of a burglar or a cat.

Delfoy appeared to be sleeping, and having put the salver on the table beside the bed, Dubley retired backwards three paces and clasped his hands in a condition of anxiety and doubt. The milk would cool—should he wake his master? He waited, scarcely breathing, when to his immense relief Delfoy moved. The first great anxiety of the day was passed, and Delfoy drank the rum and milk.

"Open the blind, Dubley, and come back in five minutes," said Delfoy.

No blinds were ever drawn more quietly. They were curtains really, and Dubley had contrived them so as to work noiselessly. All the rings were wound round with whipcord so that they never clinked, and they were drawn over wooden pulleys that never spoke. Dubley himself wore list slippers, and a disembodied spirit could not have glided about the room with less evidence of its existence except from sight. Delfoy was asleep again before Dubley had closed the door.

In five minutes he had returned noiselessly as before, and stood within the door, with uplifted hands, ready for action if opportunity offered. Delfoy awoke and said "Oh," and thus the second great anxiety of the day was passed: Delfoy had not cursed him.

Delfoy opened his letters, or rather such of them as provoked immediate attention. He read them, yawned, and said:

"Lord Maladore is coming at eleven. I'll see him; and Mr. Alister comes to lunch at one-thirty."

"Yes, sir. If you please, sir, Mr. Shout has called."

"Oh, Shout! Where is he?"

"In the sitting-room, sir."

"Shout! Ah! Well, what does he want?"

"To see you, sir. Important business, but not for long."

"I wonder how much he wants this time?" mused Delfoy, and then aloud he said: "Has he come to borrow, Dubley?"

"Well, sir, I think he have, sir. He has a borrowing air, sir, this morning," said Dubley, with a faint and bashful smile.

"What sort of an air is 'a borrowing air,' Dubley?"

"Well, sir, a quiet and subdued air, sir. Besides, sir, Mr. Shout has gloves on and a black coat, sir."

"Is that a sign?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Dubley. "Mr. Shout would never think of going out to borrow without gloves, sir. It looks more respectable, sir, and more trustworthy."

"Ah! that never occurred to me," said Delfoy absently. Then, after a pause, he added: "Take Mr. Shout the paper, say I'm glad he has called, and ask him to take breakfast with me. I'll get up."

Mr. Shout received the invitation with complacency, took off his gloves, and seated himself in an easy-chair with the remark that, as his appetite never failed him, he would "do himself the pleasure of breakfasting with his dear friend Delfoy."

Delfoy arrived in due time, in an old check travelling suit, and contemplated Shout with a grin upon his face, which was otherwise blanched and seared and generally depreciated by wear and tear, very much like a much-worn family coach in the matter of scratched varnish and faded furnishings, or a weather-beaten hatchment that had twice done duty in the rainy season.

"Anything new, Shout?"

"Nothing in the public way, but I want you to join me in a new production."

"Well, how much? Out with it."

"A monkey."

"Then let's have breakfast and talk about it."

They ate a whiting apiece in silence, when Delfoy said:

"I can't understand how people get on who eat no breakfast. I always eat a good breakfast. I should die if I didn't eat."

"Naturally," said Shout.- "I should die if I didn't drink, so oblige me with the claret."

They drank claret and coffee, ate rapidly, and talked little. Some lightly cooked cutlets followed the whiting, and then Delfoy suggested a little brandy and a cigarette. He made the suggestion with quite unnecessary hesitation. Shout responded with alacrity, and they had two glasses each before Dubley cleared the table.

"Now, about this play, Shout. I suppose it's as bad as the rest?"

Shout shook his head as he answered:

"No, capital piece. It's by Maddon. I suppose he stole it from his friend Soley before he died. He couldn't possibly have written it himself. Too good."

"What does he want for it?"

"A hundred pounds, or two pounds a week during the run."

"And you want four hundred more to put it on?"

Shout nodded, and Delfoy considered.

"I suppose, Shout, you want to make money?" he asked, after some reflection.

Shout nodded again.

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll not lend you five hundred; I'll give you one. That will be better for both of us. Let us suppose you had bought the play and had run it, and had paid me back my loan, and had made a hundred profit. Let us begin now where we are supposed to have left off. This will save me four hundred, and make you one hundred, without three months' hard work."

Shout laughed aloud, with his head thrown back, his hands in his pockets, and his legs stretched out before him. Delfoy remained unmoved, smoking deliberately.

"You're not serious?" asked Shout.

"I am, my boy. Quite."

"But it's a great chance."

"Yes, but I like certainties. What I offer you is a certainty. Think of it. You've got your profit and your time,

I never disoblige a friend, and especially such a friend as you, and I at once improve on your request. You know, Shout, you stand high in my esteem."

Delfoy finished his cigarette, and rising from his chair, said:

"Let me write a cheque for your profits at once; and then I'll tell you how you can utilise your time and make more."

Shout made no response, and his eye twinkled at the appearance of the cheque book.

"No. 2478 is your number, Shout. You observe I never make my cheques payable to persons. I know who No. 2478 is. It's not necessary anyone else should, and certainly it is not information that need be imparted to all the bank clerks in the town. There, my friend, and now to business. That's pleasure."

He handed the cheque with a bow, and then passed across the room to an Italian cabinet. Opening the inlaid door, he disclosed an iron safe, and from that he drew some scrip. Returning deliberately across the room, he said:

"Here, my dear Shout, is your scrip in the Great Coradell, and here is the scrip of your friend Vickers. Give it to him with my compliments—but no, perhaps you had better keep it for him until it is necessary for him to produce it. Go to him at once, and take him down to old Barcham's, and get him to instruct Barcham to raise an action against Lord Maladore, and Finnessmore, and Heritage, and all the rest of the directors of the Great Coradell, for false representations and fraud, and get him to set about it this morning."

"Well, I'm blistered!" exclaimed Shout.

"Quite so," said Delfoy; "and now you'd better leave here, because the Marquis is coming in half an hour to consult me about his position. Have another liqueur."

They each had another, and Shout left, with "You quite understand" on the one part and "Yes, perfectly" on the other, and much laughing and hand-shaking and an appointment for the morrow.

"My dear Marquis," said Delfoy, still smoking cigarettes, but with the air of a worn-out politician exhausted by reading the debates in *The Times*. "My dear Marquis, the House bores me."

"Oh, yes, it bores you," repeated the Marquis, peering forward at the languid Delfoy as if he would ascertain his symptoms

in detail. "Perhaps it does," he added doubtfully, as if Delfoy were not a trustworthy witness on the subject.

The incident was altogether disconcerting to the Marquis. He had come with a set purpose, and a set speech, and to be met with a general observation that the House of Commons bored his friend made his programme difficult of execution. The Marquis was not quick at repartee. To have come round this psychological corner with dexterity was as impossible to the Marquis as driving a four-in-hand down Piccadilly at five in the afternoon.

"You're a good deal better off than us, Maladore," continued the bored legislator. "You've no constituents, to begin with. You have only your own conscience and your sense of public duty to drive you forward. But in our House we're bored in all directions. We're bored by the long sittings, we're bored by the long speeches, we're bored by the bores."

The Times slipped from his knees as he rose to light another cigarette and shake himself into a condition of active life.

"Yes," said the Marquis, "I suppose you are bored." And after reflection he added: "You must be."

"Yes," repeated Delfoy, and then he also, after reflection, said, with awaking energy: "And now, Maladore, what is it you want to see me about?"

"Ah, yes, it's about the Great Coradell," answered the Marquis, with a suddenness indicative of his having just thought of it.

"A bad business," said Delfoy, shaking his head. "I've got a thousand in it; but never mind that, my dear Maladore, that's nothing. Accept my sincerest sympathy with you in this devil of a mess you've got yourself into. A devil of a mess!" he repeated as he made circles of smoke and chased them as they rose by their own levity.

"You think it a mess, do you, Colonel?"

"Only the management. The thing's good enough," said Delfoy gravely.

"Oh, you think the thing's good enough, eh?"

"Yes, with management."

"Ah," said the Marquis, "but they say they can't manage without your assistance."

"Very complimentary, but I'm afraid I can't join you. You're welcome to my thousand. I shall never sell and never trouble you, but I cannot join your board. No. Public man,

public interests. Contrary to my principles to be on commercial boards."

Delfoy said all this with much head-shaking, and frowning at his slippers, as if he were bringing out all his principles one after the other to look at the facts and dispose of them on their merits.

The Marquis applauded his principles, wished he had been guided by them himself, and said he wouldn't think of compromising Delfoy's position.

"Then what can I do for you, my dear Maladore? Select committee? Public inquiry? Question the Colonial Secretary?"

The Marquis fluttered his hands about in front of his eyes at the bare notion of public action, and exclaimed:

"Dear me, no. No publicity for heaven's sake. We merely want you to let us have some of your land. You hem us in, and we want water. We want to arrange matters quietly."

"Anything in reason, my dear fellow—anything. Fix a proper price, and you shall have the lot."

The Marquis declined taking the lot, was afraid it would be too expensive, said the directors would have to find the money to buy it, and tried to persuade the Colonel that opening up the country would raise the value of the remainder. The Colonel declared he had had enough of the property, would be glad to clear out, would like his dear friend to have the profit on the rise, and placed himself wholly at his dear friend's disposal.

"But," he added, "you, my friend, are an individual. I must deal with the corporation. You had better send your solicitor to see me, and we will come to an understanding."

"Yes, yes," said the Marquis; "but remember, Colonel, it's all good land yours, it will rise in value I'm told. You mustn't throw it away. You must hold it while we work up the value."

The Colonel shook his head, repudiated the suggestion that he could be guilty of the immoral act of profiting by another's expenditure, and showed the Marquis out with innumerable protestations of self-abnegation, as if his whole life had been devoted to personal sacrifice and the pleasure of his friends.

It was arranged that Mr. Huckle should be instructed to wait upon the Colonel the very next day and frame a contract.

As the door closed Dubley approached, with his hands almost clasped, and with anxiety on every line of his counten-

ance, as he whispered that Mr. Alister had been waiting for a quarter of an hour.

"Show him in," said Delfoy in his blandest tones.

"Yes, sir," said Dubley; "but, if you please, sir, Mrs. Delfoy's with him. What am I to do with her?"

"Send her to the devil."

"Yes, sir."

Dubley's ready complaisance somewhat appeased his master, who did not pursue his violent disposition beyond slamming the door as he entered his room, and violently promenading it, muttering imprecations upon women generally—a practice much in vogue among men who treat them ill.

His malevolent soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of the bounding Alister, who had increased in brilliance of costume ever since he had been able to call Mr. Septimus Howler his friend, and who accosted the Colonel with many expressions of anxiety about his health, and of interest in his welfare generally. Anyone could have seen at a glance that Alister had special reasons of his own for wishing long life and prosperity to his beloved friend the Colonel, and he did not make the least attempt to disguise the fact.

There is a thick folio volume to be seen in the private rooms of bankers, bill discounters, and merchants of high standing which they prize highly. It is a record of the standing and commercial probity of all firms of any pretensions throughout the United Kingdom. To be recorded in that book at all is a distinction, and to be omitted is not to exist for any purpose, where confidence and good reputation are matters of concern to the inquirer. Who compiles this book nobody knows. The omniscient being, who puts at the end of each name the cabalistic signs which indicate the precise amount of truth and honesty and solid bullion the firm in question is supposed to be operating upon, has never been seen or heard of. Who corrects the proofs is a mystery, and it is generally believed that they are left in a subterranean chamber under the floor of the Royal Exchange, and that a council of departed spirits of Governors of the Bank of England and Royal Exchange beadles revise them in the dead of night. Nothing short of this would justify the implicit faith that is placed in those wonderful pages.

The name of the firm of Bamberger & Alister, of whom Alister was the only visible representative, was entered in this book with four A ones after it, which conveyed to the

initiated that if any banker, bill discounter, or trader wanted anything better than that the deceased Governors of the Bank of England and the Royal Exchange beadles would like to know what they did want. Bamberger & Alister were, in fact, accounted among the unimpeachable, and were good for a million. Bamberger & Alister accepted the position without a blush, and acted on it.

It was a curious fact in the history of this very remarkable firm that no one had ever seen the senior partner, but it was still more extraordinary that no one ever thought the fact curious, until thinking of it had by circumstances become mere idle curiosity and a vain wish. When anyone wanted to see Bamberger & Alister they were shown to Alister. He transacted the business, and what he promised Bamberger & Alister did. At first, when the firm was young (and it was never old) Bamberger was said to be on a journey, abroad, in Scotland or in the States. Bamberger was delicate in health and needed change, but Alister was able to act, and he did act. The transactions of the firm were numerous and large; its engagements were always met, and its operations and profits increased with the phenomenal rapidity of the flocks and herds of Israel. So in like manner Alister had become bold, demonstrative, and resplendent, and pervaded the City with an air of authority.

"Well, my dear Alister," said the Colonel, "the two usual questions: what's your next appointment in the City? and has anything disagreeable happened?"

"I must be at the Bank at three," said Alister, putting his hands in his trousers pockets in a manner that indicated composure of mind and general stability. "There's nothing to talk about," he added, "except that Cottindale has been blown upon."

"How much have you with him?" asked the Colonel.

"Under five thousand," was the reply, with perfect nonchalance. If it had been five half-crowns the little man could not have been more supremely indifferent.

The Colonel nodded grimly, and ordered lunch to be served. Grilled soles, woodcock, and Johannisberg of the Castle was the Colonel's notion of gratifying the head and front of Bamberger & Alister, and he succeeded. From beginning to end of the lunch Alister sang the praises of Delfoy's cook and wine merchant, and rose with a conviction that he was extremely fortunate in having for a friend so dis-

tinguished a Member of Parliament, who was also a profound master of gastronomy.

Alister lighted a cigar, and Delfoy, somewhat contrary to custom, walked the room abstractedly, chewing a toothpick instead of smoking.

"How do you stand to-day, Alister?" he asked languidly.

Alister drew from his pocket two sheets of paper.

"These," said he, "are maturing," as he held up a long list of names, with many figures against them. "These," he added, referring to a shorter list, "are due on the fourth."

Delfoy drank another glass of Johannisberg, and asked for the total.

"The bills of the fourth are under twenty-two thousand pounds," said Alister. "Those maturing amount to nearly four hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

"What new bills have you?"

"These: about fifteen thousand pounds."

"Then how much do you want?"

"Seven thousand, but you'd better make it eight."

"Very good, my dear Alister; draw for the usual."

The usual appeared to be twice eight or sixteen thousand. It was drawn on Bamberger & Alister, and already accepted, but the drawer's name was left blank. As Delfoy took it he asked:

"And now, my dear Alister, how much unmatured Bamberger paper have I got, including this?"

"Twenty-five thousand," answered Alister, and with this answer he seemed disposed to relieve the situation by engaging in a sort of nervous laugh.

He looked at the Colonel with unusual interest as he saw him put the bill on the mantelpiece and cover it with a bronze ape strangling an obese Japanese. He then turned, and with great solemnity wrote a cheque for eight thousand pounds payable to "5409 or bearer," handed it to Alister, and drank another glass of Johannisberg.

Alister crossed the cheque, and having put it into his pocket, prepared to leave; but Delfoy lifted his finger and said:

"Wait a moment. Just one word."

The words and manner were dictatorial, and Delfoy's aspect the very reverse in appearance of what should have been produced by so delicate a lunch. His head came forward, and the right hand forefinger assumed its most offensively dictatorial manner, as he stood before the mantelpiece, and therefore with

his back to the bill and the bronze ape strangling the obese Japanese, as he asked:

"Have you reflected, my dear Alister, that your maturing bills are getting larger every day in amount, and that the total is now very large?"

"Yes."

"And you have remarked that Cottindale is being blown upon?"

"Yes."

"And what do you construe from these points?"

Alister puffed out his chest, put his hands in his pockets, and looked profoundly wise.

"You have no answer, Alister," said the Colonel. "Now will you tell me your opinion of the general state of the City?"

"Well," said Alister, with his eyebrows lifted and his lips pouting, "there's an uneasy feeling about, but it will blow over."

"Is Cottindale likely to go?"

"Not unlikely."

"Johannisberg is a wonderful wine, my dear Alister," broke in the Colonel, after a brief silence. "You should lay in a stock of it. It pulls a man together."

Alister nodded. He scarcely saw the connection, but suspected there might be one. The Colonel proceeded:

"I'm nervous about Cottindale, my dear Alister. I don't like the idea of his being talked about just now."

Alister shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, my dear sir," continued Delfoy, "it's serious—very. What would you do, my dear fellow, if your firm was given a shock by some unsuspected Cottindale?"

"I never contemplate such a proposition. It's impossible."

"Stop, stop," said the Colonel, with the right forefinger in full action. "How impossible? I say it is *not* impossible. I go further, and say it's not even improbable. More, it's probable. More, it's certain to come. Now what do you say?"

"You astound me," said Alister, and he looked it.

"You should realise your position, Alister," said the Colonel severely.

"*Our* position," corrected Alister.

"No, *your* position."

"The position of Bamberger & Alister?" said Alister.

"Precisely—*your* position."

Alister laughed hysterically as one might with a loaded re-

volver pointed at one's head. He thought the Colonel was joking, but the Colonel turned, and putting his forefinger on the head of the homicidal ape, said, with most impressive gesture:

"Suppose we had not completed this little transaction just now, where would you be on the fourth?"

Alister was speechless.

"You would be in *The Gazette*, wouldn't you?" asked Delfoy.

"Oh, well, yes, if it comes to looking at it in that way."

"That is the way to look at it, my dear Alister. It's the legal, proper way. Now tell me, where is Bamberger?"

Alister laughed hysterically as he answered:

"You are Bamberger."

Delfoy shook his head.

"You are my partner Bamberger?"

"No, my dear Alister, I am not. I have assisted you and your partner Bamberger, whoever he is, by lending you money on your bills to meet your acceptances."

"You have taken the profits."

"Wrong again. I have made profits on my advances, no doubt, but I have nothing to do with your profits. They are yours, not mine."

"You *are* my partner, and I'll say so."

"No you won't, Alister, and for two reasons. First, because, like George Washington, you never tell a lie; and secondly, because if you did tell that particular lie it would do you no good."

Alister took up his hat and made for the door.

"No, Alister, not yet. Don't act rashly. If you sit down a minute or two I'll tell you what is best for you, and what you will do when the time comes, as come it will. Be sure of that," said the forefinger, "and be calm."

"But many firms will be ruined by such an event," exclaimed Alister helplessly.

"That's unfortunate for the firms. They will suffer, my dear Alister, from the accidents of commerce. Survival of the fittest is a law in the City as elsewhere. You must never let your feelings get the better of you in commerce, Alister, as you know; but I shall make it quite clear to you that I, at least, am your friend; and if you will allow me, I will show you how you can continue to live in comfort and luxury after the catastrophe which is in store for you. You, my dear Alister, will go to Spain."

"An absconding bankrupt!"

"Ah! that's a rough way of putting it. Now, how much have you put away of your profits?"

"Not a rap."

"That is imprudent of you; but never mind, you will go to Madrid, where you will find an agreeable circle of the sporting element in commerce enjoying themselves enormously."

"Never, never!" he protested vehemently.

"Yes, you will go, my dear Alister, and I'll show you what will take you there."

He paid a visit to the Italian cabinet and produced a piece of tinted paper, delicately printed, and covered up in one part with a piece of cartridge.

"This, my dear Alister," said the Colonel, delicately balancing the paper on both hands, "will be yours by-and-by. It is a little provision I have made for you. It represents a little over twenty-five thousand pounds, lying in the Bank of Spain at Madrid."

Alister held out his hand for it.

"Not yet," said Delfoy. "The time has not yet come, and you could not get the money even if I were to give this to you,

for two reasons. You do not know the name of the person who has lodged it. You do not know the signature that will draw it."

Delfoy put the piece of paper along with the bill and reset the homicidal ape upon them. He smiled as he remarked the features of the obese Japanese.

"Now, my dear Alister, I'll describe your programme," said Delfoy, lighting a cigarette. "You will keep forty pounds in gold in a portmanteau ready packed, and when I send you a telegram containing a single name, '*poste restante*, Madrid,' or anything else as I may determine, you had better start immediately for the Continent, but don't go straight to Madrid—go by Amsterdam or Vienna, any way other than direct. And when you get to Madrid, call at the place I name in the telegram for a letter addressed to the name I shall telegraph. This piece of paper will be in the letter, and you also will be made acquainted in the same document with the name you will sign to get the money."

"What will *you* do?" asked Alister.

"Stop here. I shall have to look after my interests as a creditor of the firm of Bamberger & Alister!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PRIVATE SECRETARIES.

THE Right Hon. Peter Finnessmore had a cold. How much of it was due to the atmosphere and relaxed membranes, and how much to Great Coradells, was a moot point. He was, however, reported in the public journals to be confined to his room with "a bronchial affection," which phrase it may be remarked in passing was not used in reference to any tender emotion experienced by the Right Hon. Peter, but was designed by the newspaper scribe to convey to the "intelligent reader" that Mr. Finnessmore had a bad sore throat. The private secretaries accordingly attended their chief at Bolore House instead of at Whitehall, and were engaged in Finnessmore's business-room dealing with the morning letters which had all been concentrated there.

The principal private secretary was Mr. Edgar Quare, a young man of uncertain opinions, and prone to agree with anyone who announced convictions. He was high-shouldered and loose-jointed, high-cheekboned and hook-nosed, with short stubby black hair, and a small moustache that he seemed always trying to pull out by the roots when he was troubled with a knotty point absolutely requiring a definite conclusion.

It is the fate of the private secretary that he has not only to form opinions for himself as an ordinary member of society, but he has also to form opinions for his chief, and frequently to express them in writing without taking his chief into his confidence. This necessity materially added to the embarrassments of Mr. Quare, who underwent serious mental torture whenever complicated issues arose for solution, especially when, as happened on this particular morning, the questions invoved matters of grave public concern mingled with private ambitions, and were further complicated by points of honour and considerations of his own future advancement. The little black moustache was being wrenched into a sharp projecting spike in the course of these mental throes.

The majority of the letters had been disposed of by the writing of polite notes on official paper, and enclosed in a large official envelope, with the signature of the Right Hon. Peter, written by Mr. Quare in the lower corner, and "official, paid" in red letters instead of a postage stamp to be afterwards affixed in the upper corner, the whole contrivance to be despatched with complimentary promptitude in the hope that it would allay the anxieties of the afflicted correspondent. Those in which "Mr. Finnessmore had received Mr. Puddlechin's communication and regretted it was not in his power to comply with the request contained in it," or in which "Mr. Finnessmore had received Mr. Footey's suggestion and would give it the very fullest consideration," or in which Mr. Finnessmore "thanks his valued correspondent," or in which he politely tells his demented friend to go and hang himself at the first opportunity, in language so ridiculously gracious and condescending that he will never understand what is required of him—these and many other similar matters were disposed of out of hand by Mr. Quare, ably assisted by Mr. Heritage, with becoming solemnity and in no time; but the hard nuts still remained to be cracked, and Mr. Quare was under the impression that their importance demanded a consultation.

"You see, Heritage, this Great Coradell of yours is becoming a regular nuisance. There are nine letters about it to-day, and if something is not done to stop 'em they'll increase."

Mr. Quare looked at them gloomily and then at Philip, who had been escorting out of the Finnessmore arena half-a-dozen eccentric British subjects who had thought it worth while to thank Mr. Finnessmore for what he had said, or to suggest that he should say something different from what he had said, or put something a little stronger, all of whom were bowed out with elaborate compliments on the official note-paper, enclosed in the official envelopes, signed in the corner by Mr. Quare with the name of Peter Finnessmore.

Philip was rather staggered by the suggestion that the Great Coradell was his, and not altogether gratified. He observed something of rebuke and evil reflection in the tone with which it was uttered, and being young and nervous, he became apologetic. He said he was very sorry, and was quite sure he would like to see an end of the matter. His father, as he had already announced on previous occasions when the Great Coradell had become troublesome to Mr. Quare, was inundated with letters, under the impression that he was

responsible for the misfortunes which seemed to dog the enterprise. Whether Philip would have been prompted to repudiate the suggestion that the mine was his if it had been prosperous is doubtful, but the point need not be discussed, and would most certainly never have arisen, because we may be sure that if the Great Coradell had been prosperous Mr. Quare would never have allowed for a moment that the mine was Philip's in any way whatever.

"Now, here's the fifth letter from the man Joy; he says he isn't going to sit still and be robbed by a member of the Government. Now that's very awkward, you know, Heritage. There'll be a row in the House about it soon if we don't look out."

Philip repeated he was very sorry in tones that indicated he was also very helpless.

"You see, Heritage, this man Joy's a desperate fellow. I'm sure he is by his language, and he's a man of resource. He's got half-a-dozen businesses, and he apparently administers the lot of them himself. We shall not be able to shut up Joy, that's clear."

Quare pulled his moustache violently. Joy had become an anxiety.

"Here's another fellow named Vickers," he continued spasmodically. "We can manage him, I think. He's long-winded and bumptious, but less precise than Joy. They're evidently working together though. I daresay they're a couple of scoundrels," concluded Quare, on no other grounds than that they were troublesome to him.

At this point Mr. Julius Fludley was announced—the Departmental Secretary from Whitehall. He was a smart man in dress, and sharp in feature and in manner, close shaven, close cropped, and quick in his glance, movements, and speech. Said he:

"Good morning, Quare; good morning, Heritage. Anything fresh? Nothing fresh? How's the chief?"

Mr. Quare shrugged his shoulders.

"Quare, my friend," exclaimed the newcomer, "you express the common feeling. The situation is not agreeable."

"I don't like a man," said Quare, "who goes playing the fool in the City. It's not fair to the others, and it's not fair to *us*. What business has a member of the Government to go playing the fool in the City?"

"No right," said Fludley. "We have a grievance, all of us. How do you feel, Heritage?"

"Uncomfortable," said Philip, advancing.

"Naturally," said Fludley, "a very proper feeling. We don't blame you. We know the chief, and we know he led you into this affair. This precious Great Coradell will be Finnessmore's ruin and the Government's downfall in less than a month if some new turn is not given to the position. The Prime Minister is moving!"

"Is he?" asked Mr. Quare, with alarm.

"He is. He's been asking some nasty questions, and he will have his answers this afternoon."

"Will he?" said Quare, in still greater alarm.

"He will; and I've come round to let the chief know."

"Have you?" said Quare, who began to regard his friend with extreme awe. Presently he jerked out the inquiry: "Resignation?"

"I should think so," said Fludley. "What else can it be?"

"Ah!" said Quare, and after a pause added: "*You're* all right," as if intimating that he himself was not.

Then they all three looked at each other in silence. Philip was much disturbed. Youth and inexperience prevented him from fully appreciating the situation, and the predominating feeling with him was chagrin. He felt he was in some way responsible for the Great Coradell, and especially for the awkward position in which Finnessmore was placed with his colleagues. He was exceedingly glad to find Fludley didn't accuse him, and had thrown all the blame on Finnessmore.

"They're furious at the Colonial Office," said Fludley, who sat on the table and dropped out his information in scraps. "I'm told the Cabinet were at it a whole hour yesterday afternoon. It will depend on what Finnessmore does as to whether representations will be made to him."

"Who is likely to succeed him?" asked Quare. "Delfoy?"

Fludley shook his head and added:

"Won't do. I don't know why, but they seem to be afraid of him. He's too much in with the other side, and he's too clever. But they say you'd never catch him putting his name on a City prospectus."

"No," said Quare, assenting, and then they again reflected in silence.

"What in your opinion should Mr. Finnessmore do?"

inquired Philip, who had been endeavouring to see light throughout this colloquy. He asked Fludley, who answered emphatically:

"The Prime Minister says the only thing for him to do is to make good the losses of the investing shareholders."

"How can he do that?'

"By buying their shares at par. He says the directors are bound to do that, and Finnessmore especially, because he has made large profits on speculating for the fall."

"So he has," said Philip, looking rather angry.

"And you?" said Fludley, with a sudden turn to Philip.

"Not a penny. I've not had a transaction. My father says it's dishonourable for directors to traffic in their company's shares."

At this point a servant entered with a note for Philip. He read it, and blushed as he looked up at Quare. It was from the Lady Alice, and while Fludley explained in official language to the Right Hon. Peter that his colleagues regarded him as a rascal, Philip discussed the situation with the Lady Alice.

CHAPTER XXXII.

REACTION.

It is part of the universal economy that misfortunes always bring with them compensations, though, unfortunately, we seldom discover them, and frequently, if pointed out to us, we are too impatient to admit of their existence. Sometimes it happens that the misfortunes become practically extinguished, or at least obliterated, by some complementary emotion; and in that case we have no appreciation for anything but the rapture of the moment. Philip forgot the Great Coradell in the delight of being summoned by the Lady Alice, and he forgot more than that.

The introduction of Delfoy to Muriel at the Bolore garden party, which had passed so quietly, without leaving a single ripple on the surface, and had been perhaps the least observed of all the many incidents of the day, and, in proportion to its magnitude, the least suspected or imagined of anything that might have happened in the relations of that eminently decorous company, had cut deep down within the heart and nerves, and bid fair to strangle the very nature of the unhappy woman who had been wronged only because she had not suspected, and who suffered only because she was good.

Ten years of watchful suppression of a fact, ten years of a haunting fear of disclosure, rising at times to the condition of acute suffering, so wore and frayed the poor sensitive nerves that they had become mere shreds and tatters long before the cruel wrench of the garden party introduction and of the cold-blooded, sinister nonchalance of the man she had once loved. These shreds and tatters still held together, but they took a curious turn in their efforts to knit the frame and keep the living machine at work in seeming harmony. Muriel was light and even frivolous that night of the Bolore garden party. She made airy jokes, and laughed at them extravagantly. She gave accounts of wonderful incidents that had not occurred, and described people in eccentric toilettes that had not been there.

And when corrected she seemed amused, and winked slyly, and they were all very merry over her high spirits, and said the visit had done mamma good. But next day she was peevish and dissatisfied, anxious about everybody around her, insisted that they were unwell, and prescribed the remedies for each, kept her room, and started at every sound as if fearing the approach of some much dreaded enemy. Thus the days passed, alternating between exaltation and despondency, between exceeding caution and wild recklessness, between lively hopefulness and unreasoning fears; but always in extremes, and always strained beyond all reason, and yet so like to reason that none suspected, till an outburst came, so startling and so terrible that Heritage thanked God none saw it but himself; and it was resolved into an illness needing care and quiet, and in effect was concealed under that great mantle, "the doctor's orders," which covers so much in our daily lives that is terrible and distressing, and beyond the capacity of man to fathom in its relation to the Father of Mercies and the Infinite in Love.

All this and more Philip forgot when he was summoned by the Lady Alice. It was not that he was callous and indifferent, it was not even that he was thoughtless, but it was impossible he could consult his stepfather while this shadow was upon him. Among the many great works of the passion called Love the most marvellous is the disposition it excites in its victims to exaggerate the judgment and experience of those whom its victim adores. Incontestibly the Lady Alice was in Philip's estimation the only person who should be consulted by him in this extraordinary political and commercial combination in which he found himself involved.

The Lady Alice was dressed for walking. She stood in the middle of the drawing-room waiting for her slave, as she buttoned her glove, and regarded him with a whimsical air as she said:

"Well, Philip, you're looking as glum as the rest of them. What *is* it all about?"

Her gaiety drove some of the gloom away from Philip, but he showed no levity as he answered:

"I'm afraid we cannot tell what's the matter. It's only during the last few minutes I have got at the beginning of it."

She shook her head gaily as she answered:

"I'm afraid you're very young, Philip, and much in need of my guidance. That's why I sent for you. *I* know all about it. My disreputable uncle has been at his old tricks again.

I know him. That illness of his," she continued, with a jerk of the head in the direction of the Right Honourable Peter's room, "is a political one—a sort of diplomatic distemper. I can advise you. Will you do as I wish?" she asked eagerly, earnestly, and with that piercing glance that, coming out of a face that a moment before was all smiles and levity, went straight to the heart of the questioned one.

"Most certainly."

"Then see your stepfather while I am out with my mother, and meet me here at four while she is taking her nap. I want to know what he thinks should be done to keep your name from being mixed up with my uncle's. Uncle's my guardian and trustee, you know, but I've a very poor opinion of him. Now go quick before mamma comes."

Philip exchanged a few words with Quare before leaving.

"Very obstinate," said Quare, biting a pen. "Says he's too ill to discuss business. Fludley doesn't believe him, and Fludley is usually right. He's got his head tied up, and has a lot of bottles round him. Fludley says he must have had a good breakfast, from the look of the empty plates lying about. Hearty appetite looks suspicious. Fludley's a very quick fellow. I suppose it's all up; but I don't know. A fellow can't tell, you know, when he's not certain about his facts."

Philip hurried off to Cavendish Square. He knew Heritage was at home, for ever since his mother's illness the City had been a secondary consideration with his stepfather. Heritage was singularly grave and pale. He took Philip by the hand, and clasped his shoulder as he said:

"You're mother's still very ill — still delirious — still incessantly talking and singing and crying day and night, and it's better you should not see her. It's painful to see her, and her language is quite uncontrolled by reason. But," he added more cheerfully, "I'm glad you've come. I have something to say to you."

"Yes,' said Philip gravely, "and I have something to say, but I'm loth to intrude upon you in the circumstances."

Heritage smiled as he said:

"Sit down and let me hear. I guess the subject. The anticipated difficulty has arisen, eh?"

Philip's gratitude at having his task made easy shone upon his face through the gravity and sadness that enshrouded it. He had always venerated his stepfather, but during the later years of their lives his feelings with regard to him had acquired

that strongly rooted sentiment of engrossing love that knows of no gauge capable of measuring it either in height, breadth, or depth. Unbounded respect for his knowledge and experience had grown with every day of their closer intercourse of these later times. He had never expressed these sentiments of unstinted trust and devotion chiefly because he was scarcely conscious that he was imbued with them. They were, indeed, part of his being, and involuntarily assumed the shape of active deference and consideration.

Philip told the story of the practical failure of the Great Coradell scheme through the inanity of the directors, as he conceived the case; and, in a measure, he defended Finnessmore, and announced with some enthusiasm that, with the assistance of Delfoy, the property would be worth about half the price paid for it. He told the story lamely, with hesitation and some shame, it was such a dismal mess.

Heritage listened patiently, stroking his chin, and when Philip had finished, he said:

"I'm glad you have come to me. I have been expecting you; and thinking you were fearful of making the disclosure, I had intended opening the subject myself. It's a very bad case, much worse than I suspected when our highly respectable friend Finnessmore submitted it. I like to suppose he *believed* what he said when he spoke first about the matter, but having regard to what I have since heard of him I cannot help doubting it."

Philip essayed to speak, when Heritage stopped him, saying:

"No, don't tell me anything about him. You may be betraying confidences. Let me tell you what I have done, and what you should do to put matters right."

Philip was much relieved at this, and clasped his hands between his knees in his anxiety and earnestness.

"It was impossible," continued Heritage, "that I could let you embark in an enterprise of this kind without taking some steps to enable me to protect you if protection were needed; and when I found there was a disposition to use your name as if it were mine, and when I found the company-mongering fraternity into whose hands you had fallen were unscrupulous enough to put it about casually and indefinitely that I was personally interested in the scheme I made up my mind to do two things. I resolved to procure accurate information about the property, and to get such control of the company.

by purchasing in the open market, as would enable me to prevent the wreckers from reaping a second harvest out of the ruin they have created. There," said Heritage, pointing to a large packet of blue papers on his writing-table, "is a truthful report of the property; and it will surprise you to hear that at one time it all belonged to your trusted hope, Mr. Delfoy."

Philip started as if he had been struck.

"You have nothing to look for in that quarter. Delfoy sold it to another, who sold it to you, and as everything connected with the transaction is perfectly regular you cannot go back upon the bargain. Delfoy, too, is a subscriber to your company, and on the surface a loser by your mismanagement. The property, however, is not bad in itself. It is probably better even than any of those who perpetrated the swindle have any conception of. What it needs is a railway, and to make a railway will cost as much money as you have already drawn from the public for the thing itself. You have, therefore, bought a white elephant. Colonies, however, move fast, and in ten years' time the property may be, and probably will be, worth all you paid for it."

That was a relief for Philip, who breathed again.

"Now," continued Heritage, "I come to the next step. Having satisfied myself about the property, I ordered the purchase of the stock of the company, and as no one else would buy it, I hear this morning that I am possessed of the power to call up more than there is in existence, and I mean to have it delivered to my brokers. The price I have paid for it will make the property a cheap purchase for me."

Philip began to smile.

"So much for the business aspect of the affair," said Heritage, who was losing some of his sombreness, and he even smiled. He became stern again as he added, "But there is your honour! You have been associated with a parcel of swindlers and City blacklegs, and have been used by them to rob the investing public according to law. You must rub off the pitch with which you have defiled yourself through associating with these noble lords and right honourable gentleman who do not think it unbecoming to lend their names to felonious transactions of this sort, under the protection of figments of law; and I can show you how you can do so."

He paused, and drew from the bundle of papers a formal looking draft of a letter that he said Philip must sign, and when signed, should issue. It was an announcement that

Philip Heritage was prepared to buy at par all shares in the Great Coradell held at that date by shareholders who had subscribed to the original allotment on the faith of the prospectus, and who had not otherwise disposed of their shares. When he had read the paper, Heritage said:

"This will not be a complete wiping out of the stain, but you cannot go further without running the risk of playing into the hands of the rascals who have deceived you and the shareholders. The chances, however, are that all the poorer people, and those who can least afford to be swindled, still have their shares. Those who have sold at a loss cannot be reached."

He paused, and then said with some bitterness:

"And now I have to show you how I intend to punish these rascals with whom you have been associated. Everyone of them has been selling heavily as I have been buying. They will have to deliver, and the effect of this circular of yours will be to send the price bounding up. Your right honourable chief, Philip, who is a scoundrel, mark you—and for whose introduction to you I admit I am responsible, and therefore, to blame—will have to buy at the high price to deliver to me, or pay over the difference; and such will be the scramble to get out that everyone among them will suffer heavily. I expect to sweep out of their greedy maws every penny they have gained. After this we must reconstruct the company, and put it on an honest footing. Now sign."

Philip signed in silence, and trembled. He regarded his stepfather with awe.

"Now, Philip," said Heritage, "don't let a whisper of this pass your lips. Leave this paper with me, and don't resign your seat at the board. By the way, make it a rule, my boy, never to resign any position until you can honestly say you leave a clear bill behind you."

But what of the Lady Alice? Philip had clean forgotten all about her, and it was five o'clock.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SEVERAL SORTS OF JOY.

"MY DEAREST ALICE," wrote Philip, with all the confidence and enthusiasm of one who had no doubt about the terms on which he stood to the lady he addressed, "I am dreadfully distressed at my non-return to your feet, according to appointment, but I am sure you will forgive me when I tell you that my failure was occasioned by the time I was obliged to spend in fulfilling your first dear commands. Oh that I could express to you how glad I am I took your advice, and how wonderfully my father fulfilled all our expectations, or perhaps I should say your expectations, for it was you and not I who proposed an appeal to him. His generosity is equal to his wisdom, and he has given me a most precise and yet simple programme, by following which my honour will be saved and all will be done exactly as I think you would have it. I am overjoyed, and long for the moment when I can tell you all about it. I am not to whisper the details to anyone," he continued, and then suddenly stopped, considered, and concluded that this last sentence would be shockingly offensive to his angel of wisdom and prudence. He drew his pen through it, then imagined the dearest one would read it notwithstanding, and having obliterated it utterly, was afraid she would be offended at such an exhibition of want of trust in her as was exhibited by a laboriously erased line. He accordingly fell to writing the entire letter again, and was haunted all through by the presumption that he was deceiving her by omitting the sentence. He continued the note with the feeling that he was a dastardly criminal, and dashed to the end, with protestations of undying love, without saying a single word about the Right Honourable Peter, or giving any hint of what was in store for him.

Apart from his stepfather's injunction of secrecy, he was not quite sure that the Lady Alice would be as pleased as she had professed she would be at her uncle's discomfiture, and Philip

proved once more in the history of the human race that lovers are usually cautious in the pursuit of their object.

During the compilation of this interesting and withal joyfu letter an incident having a close connection with the matter it dealt with was being enacted in a different portion of the town. The actors were Mr. Geoffrey Delfoy, M.P., Mr. Alpheus Vickers, and the owner of the shop in which the interview occurred, to wit, Matthew Joy, pork-butcher, baker and general purveyor of all kinds of provisions.

"He's come, you see, Joy," said Vickers, heralding his companion. "I told you he would. Mr. Delfoy, Member of Parliament, Joy; here he is, come to assist you, Joy, as a public man and fellow-sufferer with you, Joy."

The exuberant Vickers beamed and swelled and bowed and ladled out the Member of Parliament to the pork-butcher as if he were so much sauce to the pork-butcher's substance; and the pork-butcher spread out his portly figure and planted his knife on the block with a British subject air, and looked defiance at the Member of Parliament, not because he was not gratified by the presence of the member and proud to receive him, but because the indignation of the British subject was paramount; and being thus placed, the pork-butcher burst upon the member with an oration:

"I'm proud to see you here, sir," said Joy. "Friend Vickers said you would come, but I did *not* believe him—no, I did *not*."

Mr. Joy stuck the large carving knife held in his left hand into the chopping-block and frowned with a furious aspect.

"Public men," he continued, "are not public men. They're private men, selfish men, grinding their own axe and leaving the people whom they profess to serve to grind their millions of axes without a grindstone among the whole lot. How can they grind their axes without a grindstone? It can't be done, but if you are prepared to assist the people in resisting fraud and imposition, I honour you, sir, and I honour friend Vickers for bringing you here."

With this the pork-butcher put down his knife, and having wiped his hands on his white apron, extended them to his two visitors and shook hands with them. Delfoy was by this action encouraged to express a hope that the pork-butcher was well, and Joy answered with some asperity:

"Well, if it comes to that, I am well; but look you here, sir, I ask you now, as a Member of Parliament, looking at me in

my own shop, standing in my own premises, do you think I'm the sort of person who should be hauled up to the Marylebone Police Court because I have my own particular way of looking after my own family?"

Delfoy was rather upset by this question. He was not quite clear as to its pertinence, having regard to the purpose of his visit. He regarded the floor modestly, with his head perked very much forward, and threw out a doubtful:

"Well, no, I should say not, Mr. Joy."

"No," said the pork-butcher, "you should say not. Now I daresay you as a Member of Parliament would want to make out that Acts of Parliament are wise and proper in all cases, and that any man as acts cont'ry to them is a bad man, to be hauled up as I have this day been hauled up at the Marylebone Police Court?"

"No," said Delfoy, with hesitation, and with his eye accidentally resting on the scales.

"No, it wasn't light weight, Mr. Delfoy, nor nothing so sensible or proper as the correcting of weights and measures by the public authority so entitled to do. It's the school board as 'as been at me, because it seems to think it knows better how to educate my children than I do, and I want to know why I should be hauled up to the Marylebone Police Court for educating my children in my way, when you, as a Member of Parliament, living in a large private house, as I suppose you do, with a knocker on the outside and a hall porter on the inside, can do as you like without having any interference by the school board in the way you educate your children, supposin' you have some."

Delfoy shook his head, and was about to suggest a change of subject, when the pork-butcher took the action for a disclaimer of offspring and dashed ahead with his argument, foaming and blustering all about the shop.

"No, you have no children, but I have, and I'll show them to you. Walk this way, gents. I've got seven children, all hale and hearty so far as six of em's concerned, and the seventh, being only a week old, promises well. This way, gents."

They went into a little parlour at the back of the shop, and the pork-butcher opening a doorway, shouted with terrific force up a narrow and precipitous staircase:

"'Arriet, bring down Alfred to see some gentlemen—sharp."

Returning, he announced, with great show of indignation, as if he had been systematically contradicted by his audience:

"I want you to understand, gentlemen, and particular you, Mr. Delfoy, as a Member of Parliament, that my children are educated from the day of their birth to fill that station of life in which they are born, and no other, because it's a good station, and because it's their station, and because it's nobody else's station. And mark you, gentlemen, I don't want to go educating my children in the calling of other people, such as soldiering, which I don't hold with, or with the law, which is an instrument of discord, or with physicking, which is a mere mending and patching job; but I educates *my* children in carrying on them things that men and women lives by and must have—the eating and drinking, gents—the going to and fro, and the living and moving agents as constitutes the power and the strength and the GO, gents, of the entire human family. And here you observe," continued the pork-butcher, directing attention to the doorway, "is my eldest, Alfred Light Joy, aged twelve."

He was a short, stout boy, very red in the face, dressed in the garb of a butcher, with a steel hanging from his girdle and a large knife in his hand, looking as solemn as any middle-aged butcher in all London. He was accompanied by a very anxious woman, obviously a sister to Mr. Joy, bearing a toy bullock about two feet long, scored all over with lines, which she carefully placed on the table.

"Now," said the pork-butcher, "Alfred Light Joy is going to be a butcher, and what do I do? I teach him his trade. He can read, write, cipher up to rule of three, and, gents—you especially, Mr. Delfoy, being a Member of Parliament—he can cut up a bullock, and tell you every joint in the bullock's body, and you shall see him do it. Yes," exclaimed the pork-butcher, as he observed an indication of revolt upon the part of the member, "you shall *see* him do it."

There was no resisting the pork-butcher. The imitation bullock was solemnly laid on a table by Harriet Joy, who, having discharged her function as conductor, retired into the corner of the room and looked on with a beaming countenance at the proceedings of her resplendent brother and her promising nephew. Joy also retired from the table, and, with outspread arms, walked backwards from the youthful butcher as if he would keep back the advancing crowd, consisting of the two visitors, and impress all present with the importance of giving

The Joy System of Education.

the delineator room. Alfred Light Joy, in the centre of the arena, turned round, flourished his knife in the air, made one or two passes on the steel, and then, turning to the wooden bullock, divided the carcase by inserting the knife in the cracks. As he separated the effigy the joints were laid out and named by the small butcher with the gravity of an archdeacon.

"There," said the pork-butcher, "is that education? My sister teaches 'em their school learning, and I'm hauled up at the Marylebone Police Court. 'Arriet, bring Benjamin."

The next boy, aged ten, was announced as "Benjamin Air Joy," and the pork-butcher informed the Member of Parliament that his children were taught their alphabet by the agency of the baptismal font, so far as circumstances permitted. "If I had twenty-six of 'em, gents, I should name 'em alphabetical," said the parental Joy. "'A' for 'Alfred,' 'B' for 'Benjamin.'"

"Excellent idea," said the Colonel, nodding his head, "most admirable. A, B, C, Mr. Vickers, as you see."

"Right, sir. My children, gents, are named alphabetical, as you say, sir, and with a second name taken from the great mysteries of life. Alfred Light Joy and Benjamin Air Joy you see before you. Charles Water Joy, David Earth Joy, and Edmund Iron Joy are up-stairs learning the multiplication table, while Fanny Mind Joy is in the nursery with Matilda Ann; and Gertrude Soul Joy, being one week old, is with her mother. And yet, if you please, gents, I'm hauled up at the Marylebone Police Court because I don't educate my children by Act of Parliament. Is that right, sir?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Delfoy, who at last saw his chance. The action of the school board is most improper. You are the victim, Mr. Joy, of a mechanical system that is a disgrace to a civilised community."

"Give me your hand," shouted Joy, "I'm proud to shake the hand of a Member of Parliament who has sound views on the education of youth, and does not approve of the anxious parent being dragged up to the Marylebone Police Court."

Having secured the member's hand, Joy dealt with it after the manner of a butcher and a parent of energy.

"Quite right, quite right," gasped Delfoy between the spasms of anguish caused by the manual wrench of the butcher; "but what we came to see you about was the Great Coradell."

"The Great Coradell," exclaimed the butcher, at once

hurling the Marylebone Police Court, the wooden bullock, and the entire family to a distance, "is a monstrous swindle by a member of the Government. I've written to him to tell him so. He'll not answer me. Mr. Delfoy," continued the pork butcher solemnly, "friend Vickers has brought you here to talk of the Great Coradell. What about the Great Coradell? Am I to get my money back?"

"Certainly," said Delfoy, "certainly. You are entitled to it. We are resolved to put down these gross impositions, and you, Mr. Joy, are the man to assist, because you are a courageous man."

"I am, sir," roared the pork-butcher, shaking his fist, "that I am."

"Yes, you are a courageous man, Mr. Joy," said Delfoy, "and as regards this interference of the school board with your system of education, I'll see the vice-president of the council, and have an exception made from the routine in your case. But, Mr. Joy, you must remember that you are an exceptional man, and if all parents were like you there would be no need of school boards."

"Oh," gasped the pork-butcher, glaring out of the shop window, as he surveyed the skies in deep thought. "That's it, is it? I see. I'm uncommon."

"*Very* uncommon," said the Colonel, who had at last discovered an anchorage. "Your friend Mr. Vickers will come back this afternoon and tell you how to act about the Great Coradell, and you may in all things rely upon my support as a fellow-sufferer."

They shook hands with the pork-butcher and left.

Later in the day Mr. Barcham was honoured with another client in pursuit of the directors of the Great Coradell.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A MODEL HEIR.

THE issue of what became known as the Heritage circular in connection with the Great Coradell produced all the effects the head of the house of Heritage anticipated, and a few more results that no human being of finite perceptions could have imagined possible. The anticipated rise came with a bound. If the house of Heritage would buy at par the holdings of all original shareholders there was something in Great Coradell. That is what the Stock Exchange said; so everybody bought who could persuade anyone else to sell, and Great Coradells were again at a premium.

So far so good for Heritage; but others saw a chance in this marvellous change in public confidence, brought about by what Morris Heritage regarded as a simple act of justice. The "City" would have required a visit from the Archangel Gabriel, supported by the best bankers' references, before it, as a commercial entity, would have believed in the possibility of anyone paying par for anything on any other grounds than that it was worth it; and it is a curious fact in the ethics of commerce of the stock-jobbing order that if any man of ordinary probity and accepted honesty were to go to the door of the Exchange and openly announce an intention of doing a given thing nobody would be found in the whole commercial world to believe that he intended doing it, but each and all of them would ponder over the statement he had made, in the hopes of discovering what actual intention this most pretentious lie was designed to cover. Heritage himself, it must be admitted, had profited by this curious hallucination, and in moments of confidence he had frequently stated to his intimates that he had made many thousands of pounds during his career by simply telling the truth to men he knew to be liars, and who supposed everyone else to be like themselves.

Among the unexpected results of the Heritage circular was the awakened zeal of the Coradell board, following on the

Coradell rise. They met, and, led off by the Right Hon. Peter, they subscribed the capital necessary for the purchase of Colonel Delfoy's land among themselves. The fact was duly chronicled in *The City Tripod*, with a most exhilarating eulogium upon the probity, foresight, and energy of the directors, and up went the shares still higher, so that no ordinary investor would sell, not even Mr. Joy the pork-butcher; and as for Littercan, he declared in the most forcible language of his vocabulary that he had "know'd it all along."

The members of the board who were not otherwise engaged at this time made a point of appearing as often and as much as possible in the public thoroughfares, within a radius of half a mile of Old Broad Street, with the composed air of men who feared nothing, and were rather proud of themselves than otherwise. At the same time they were selling at the high price as fast as possible, and recouping themselves for their contribution to the capital necessary to acquire the Colonel's land. It is needless to add that Heritage did not join in this stampede, but in the language of the Stock Exchange "sat tight," and waited for the settling day.

Another and still more curious result of the Heritage circular was a letter from Mr. Delfoy in the Albany to Mrs. Delfoy in Carlton Gardens, where she held her court during the season, requiring her to arrange for a select dinner party of twelve to celebrate a domestic triumph. The same note requested her also to issue the invitations to Mr. and Mrs. Chippering and Mr. Bowdler, M.P., while he would enclose the cards to his father and mother and sister, and four others whom he did not name. The nameless ones proved to be his old friends Mr. Marmaduke Bray and Mr. Shout and his new friends Mr. Alpheus Vickers and Miss Laura Vickers.

Geoffrey Delfoy had recovered his position by sheer audacity, and there was something of the audacious in his manner of celebrating the triumph he had achieved. The idea of associating Miss Laura Vickers at the same table with his mother was his notion of a humorous revenge for sundry aspersions the Lady Grace had seen fit to cast upon him concerning his league with vulgar commerce, coupled with her readiness to participate in the proceeds resulting from the obnoxious companionship. The Lady Grace had declared she would never forgive Geoffrey, and Geoffrey thought he would show his mother one or two City instruments of the more humble sort to provoke a flow of superlatives of indignation

on her part, and at the same time show her what her dear Geoffrey had endured in the shape of grovelling companionship in the achievement of a family ambition. By some means, probably the loquacity of her daughter-in-law, the Lady Grace got wind of what was in store for her, and she and her daughter, now grown wizen and dyspeptic, stayed at home.

The evening began by a connubial altercation—an incident of rare occurrence owing to the very few opportunities for communication of any sort open to Mrs. Delfoy. The pair had not met since she had made an ineffectual attempt to procure an interview with her husband in the Albany; and this incident was the occasion of remonstrances on the part of Delfoy and indignation on the part of his wife, prefaced by a preliminary skirmish, but all proceeding from cause to effect in the most natural manner. They met in the drawing-room. Mrs. Delfoy, still afflicted by a preference for colours and ends, and surrounded by a black poodle, shaven after the French fashion, and three pugs of varying degrees of fatness, saluted her husband with volatile grace. Delfoy nodded indifferently and rang the bell. A footman appeared, to whom he said, as if casually:

"Set for twelve."

"My dear!" exclaimed the lady of the house.

"Set the table for twelve," repeated Delfoy, and the footman left the room.

"Do you keep deaf servants, Mrs. Delfoy?" asked the Member of Parliament.

"You *are* a brute," said the lady, but remembering her rouge, she checked the growing tear.

"If I am a brute, why do you come to my chambers to provoke me?" he inquired.

"I'll *never* come again."

"I'm glad to hear it," was the rejoinder. "Very glad; I shall be relieved of at least one annoyance in the future."

In another moment the tears of vexation would have been past control, but Mr. and Miss Vickers were announced, and smiling graciousness took the place of angry passion as Delfoy remarked:

"I have been apologising to my dear wife, Miss Vickers, for having asked your father to bring you without her having previousy made your acquaintance, and I must now apologise to you on the same ground. I trust you will be equally as gracious as my dear wife, and grant me your pardon."

Laura had become a tall, striking-looking woman, with a profusion of dark brown hair, large dark eyes, very much on the alert, and a moderately sized pouting mouth. She presented a general appearance of cheerfulness, while at the same time she gave one the impression, in the vocabulary of her usual companions, of being "all there."

She made a most graceful bow, almost verging upon a courtesy, and then quite spoilt the performance by saying in rather a hoarse voice: "Granted, sir."

Delfoy indulged his emotions consequent upon this catastrophe by a grim smile, which he dexterously hid by his complimentary bow.

It is fortunate for Laura that the spirited Mr. Shout was not present during this incident. He had taken great pains with Laura in educating her for the stage—hence the finish of her drawing-room obeisance; but having no written part in the contingency that had arisen, and being quite ignorant of the etiquette that had been transgressed, she had only her own resources to fall back upon, and they were insufficient. She was, however, perfectly happy, and quite delighted at finding herself in the sumptuous drawing-room, with the knowledge that the "model" dress in claret silk which she had "picked up cheap" in Oxford Street only the day before was quite equal to the situation. Whatever may have been wanting, and apparently nothing was, her father's speech would have supplied it, as he passed his hand over his forehead and exclaimed:

"Mr. Delfoy, sir, I'm proud to think you should have honoured me and my daughter by an invitation on this special occasion, as you term it, in this magnificent mansion. I am proud, Mr. Delfoy, because I feel that your perspicacity has penetrated the obscurity that veils the personality of Alpheus Vickers, and has recognised that he is sterling, sir—sterling—and I know you will always find him so."

With this Mr. Vickers held out his hand, and Delfoy, grasping it and bowing with an uncommon gravity, said he was sure he might always rely on his friend's countenance and support.

"You see, madam," said Mr. Vickers to Mrs. Delfoy, who continued to be all smiles and graciousness, "your husband's distinguished position and his great wealth lay him open to much deception, and but for his perspicacity and acumen he would become a prey to continual deception. The great capitalist, madam, always lives in an atmosphere of envy and dissimulation, and is the constant prey of avarice—some even

say the natural and legitimate prey of the avaricious and impecunious."

Mrs. Delfoy smiled and said, "How singular—really," and seemed quite interested in the phenomenal Geoffrey Delfoy, as of some one wholly disassociated from her surroundings. Laura looked on, basking in the evidences of wealth around her, and found the part sketched for her by Mr. Shout exceedingly agreeable and easy, which was "to keep her mouth shut and smile around as if she liked being there."

The arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Chippering, the latter somewhat infirm, and resting on her husband's arm from sheer necessity, put a stop to the delivery of further compliments by Mr. Vickers. The head of the house of Delfoy, also much stricken by time, or what amounted to the same thing, by worry, irritation, and non-success, was led to Mrs. Delfoy by her incomparable husband, with apologies for the absence of his mother and sister. And then came the resonant Marmaduke Bray, who by mere strength of larynx took possession of the entire company, and gilded the veriest platitudes with a grace of oratory that made them pass for Johnsonian apothegm. Mrs. Delfoy declared that Mr. Bray was a sweet man and full of poetry, but Squarely, a coarse fat man, who wrote for *The Frivol* and was jealous, said it was blatant rubbish.

Mr. William Shout and Mr. Bowdler made up the party, and when they had all taken their places in the dining-room, Geoffrey Delfoy ostentatiously ordered the removal of the vacant chair on his right, which brought Laura Vickers next to him, and made things more agreeable if less amusing to his cynical nature than the realisation of his orignal scheme, which had included the presence of his mother. Bray, sitting on the hostess's right, had an admirable audience, with Mr. Vickers opposite and Bowdler on his right. Squarely sat on the other side of Bowdler, and being a gourmand, was perfectly content to let Bray talk while he ate. As Delfoy the elder was a silent man, Squarely was glad to be next him, for, being undisturbed at his trough, he managed to secure a second service of three of the dishes without attracting observation. Mrs. Chippering sat opposite Laura and next her son-in-law, whom she was desperately afraid of; and Shout sat on the other side of Laura, with Chippering on his right.

Looking round the table, and contemplating the various parts each of his guests had played in his recent triumphs, Geoffrey Delfoy was mightily amused, and looked forward to

more striking developments by the handling of the same material. One or two of the company had been told that the occasion was special, but in what way no one had any conception. This was known only to the host, and he waited until the dessert was on the table before he enlightened them.

"Now, my friends," said he, retaining his seat, "I have something to say to you of great interest to me and my family, and I hope to all here this evening."

This remark hushed even the oratorical Bray, who was in the middle of a sonnet of Byron's, and was rapidly reducing his hostess to a state of moral subjection. Delfoy proceeded:

"I have to announce to you—this select family circle of my intimate friends—that you have all contributed in ways you have probably no conception of in enabling me to achieve the ambition of my life. I regret my dear mother and my dear sister are not present and will not be made acquainted with what I am about to communicate until my very dear father reaches home this evening. They would have been here, but you will observe that if they had been with us there would have been thirteen at the table, and my dear mother has views on that subject. Neither my dear mother nor my dear sister would come without the other, although, as they had the option of changing their minds at the last moment, I had a chair placed for one here on my right hand. I could not meet the case otherwise, as I had eleven acceptances; and others, such as Lord Feeldmore and dear old Huckle and one or two more were obliged to decline."

Delfoy paused, and looked very gravely at the decanters. Everyone was listening with breathless interest and almost amazement at the idea of their being personally concerned in this family matter, whatever it was. The only person whose feelings were undisturbed was Delfoy the elder, and he seemed almost unconcerned. He had given Geoffrey up long ago; and was content to take his allowance and deplore the decadence of the country on the well-established grounds set forth in the opening chapters of this record.

"Yes," continued Geoffrey, "this is a great epoch in my family history. It is to you, my very dear father, and you, my very dear wife, that I wish particularly to address myself. Dubley," he continued, turning to his valet, whom he had requested to appear at the close of the dinner, "fetch me a brown paper parcel I have left on the library table."

There was another distressing silence.

"Oh, Mr. Bray," exclaimed the hostess in a despairing whisper, "is he going to commit suicide?"

"Your husband, Mrs. Delfoy," said the editor imperiously, "is a genius. Have patience."

Dubley returned with the parcel, and Geoffrey Delfoy rising from his seat, said with a quivering voice, which indicated emotion of a high order:

"Here, my very dear father and my very dear wife, are the title deeds of the Hanswick and Luckross estates. I have won them back from the rapacious maw of the money-lender; and I trust I shall have the pleasure of seeing you, my very dear father, take up your residence in the halls of your ancestors for the rest of your days. May they be long and happy."

As he said this he held out his hand to his father, who at first scarcely appreciated the magnitude of the announcement; and when he did comprehend it he seemed struck with an aspect of amazement, which gradually gave way to a paroxysm of senile joy as he cried out incoherently, midst tears and sighs:

"Oh! Geoffrey—boy—my son! Oh! amazing—yet how like Geoffrey! Oh! my friends, pardon me—yes, like Geoffrey—yes, so like my boy—at last, at last!"

And then he sat and wept, with his head resting on his hands, and trembling with an emotion altogether genuine. Coming as the incident did after long years of waiting and striving, of anxiety and deception, of recklessness and shiftlessness, of brutal indifference and utter selfishness; and coming as it did when all hope was gone, and when the pride of the family had been bruised and broken, and altogether driven from his nature, the miserable old man was crushed by the sudden joy, and groaned for very weakness and with the despair of a dying reaper with the sickle in his hand!

CHAPTER XXXV.

BOWDLER'S MISSION.

MR. SHOUT'S anxiety regarding the drawing-room deportment of Laura Vickers, and the corresponding disposition of the young lady herself to rely upon his guidance in the novel regions in which she found herself, led to an early departure from the dining-room on the part of Shout; and Marmaduke Bray's success with his impressionable hostess caused him early to follow, without waiting for the return of Delfoy.

Shout's injunction to Laura to keep her mouth shut and look pleased did not, in her opinion, extend to confidences between the two, and she took advantage of a *tête-à-tête* to express her views on the situation in her own peculiar way. She first confided to her friend that it was "a regular slap up place," and when Shout suggested that "delightful" would be a more appropriate encomium, she responded by remarking that "the old gent seemed uncommon flummuxed, and no wonder"; and despite Shout's correction that she should say his emotions had overcome him, she pursued her reflections by remarking that "Delfoy must be no end of a stunner," but that his wife "was rather a softie."

Before Shout could administer further correction or advice Mrs. Delfoy was seen bearing down upon them wreathed with smiles, and trailing a gigantic feather fan over her left shoulder. Shout rose in despair, and she took his seat, with a tremendous sigh and a craning of the neck that threatened dislocation, as she remarked in her best company accents:

"My dear husband is very much upset. They have put his father to bed in the south room, and Dubley has gone to tell the Lady Grace he would stay the night. These occurrences are most trying to the nerves, my dear." She appealed to Miss Vickers, who suddenly remembered two words in *The Renunciation* which she used to speak when on tour with Shout, and which she thought sufficiently appropriate to deliver at this juncture. She did so promptly.

"Most noble!" she exclaimed, and then feeling the observation was not quite so appropriate as she had supposed, and that it needed some kind of explanation, she added with uncommon emphasis: "Your husband's a regular trump, Mrs. Delfoy; I could hug him."

"Indeed," said the lady of the house, with a start and a sudden quiver of the lip. Then, as suddenly, her features relaxed into a smile as the voice of Marmaduke Bray resounded through the room, on the subject of "genius in relation to domestic felicity," a glorious example of which, he was explaining in a loud voice to Mrs. Chippering, they had been favoured with that evening.

The example himself appeared immediately afterwards, followed by his friends from the dining-room, and taking his stand upon the hearthrug, announced that his dear father was sleeping peacefully.

"Delfoy, I envy you," cried Bray, bursting upon the calm of the drawing-room with what appeared to be a tremendous shout. "Yes, I envy you. I thought I envied no man, but this night I envy you. I do not envy you your wealth: that you enjoy in common with many others. Wealth can be acquired. The brutish person can acquire riches, but only the wise know how to dispense them. I envy you, Delfoy, to-night in the exercise of your filial instincts. You have reaped a harvest of gratitude, of devotion, of ennobling sentiments, and we feel proud that we can name you as our friend. Delfoy, we honour you. Give me your hand!"

Bray strode up to the hearthrug, and grasping the hand of the model son, announced to the admiring company that he could hear the wings of the angels and the archangels, the seraphim and the cherubim engaging in concerted music in honour of his friend's filial devotion. Mr. Vickers, not to be outdone, declared he also could hear them "twanging their harps," and Mrs. Delfoy wept tears of gratitude, and would have kissed her husband before the company if she had dared. Her mother, however, remarked to Chippering that "she didn't see what there was to make so much fuss about," a commonplace observation arising out of her conclusion that her eccentric son-in-law had done "no more than he ought to have done." She might have added, without any deviation from the truth, that in going through the melodramatic action of exhibiting a brown paper parcel of deeds transferring the Luckross estates to himself, and inviting his father to live in

Luckross Castle, he had done no more than save himself the cost of a chief steward.

The majority of the company, however, deemed the action to be one of unusual generosity and filial devotion, and spent the rest of the evening in producing all the adulatory adjectives in their vocabulary in honour of the incident. They then gradually dispersed, with the exception of Bowdler, who had sometime earlier made a pretext of going home, but had mysteriously retired into the library, where Delfoy found him smoking a short pipe.

"Excuse me, Delfoy," said the rough and ready Bowdler, "but Bray's a humbug. How is it you put up with him?"

"Humbugs are useful, Bowdler. My wife adores him. She has just told me so. Take a glass of whisky and soda and let's talk. I've something to say."

Bowdler refilled his pipe, took three fingers of whisky and as much plain water, expatiated upon the character of the spirit, detected the production of three separate distilleries in it, and wound up his discourse by again declaring Bray to be a humbug.

"Yes, yes," said Delfoy, settling in his chair with a cigarette. "We'll leave Bray alone for the present. I want to talk to you about your people, Bowdler."

Bowdler knit his shaggy brow, compressed his thick coarse lips, and echoed:

"*My* people?"

"Yes, your workpeople. The people you're always talking about, who labour and suffer and starve that others may grow rich. Your 'moilers and toilers,' as you call them. They're very ill-off, I suppose," mused Delfoy, as if to himself rather than addressing his companion, "very ill-off, struggling for bare subsistence on meagre wages, while their employers batten on their wasted sinews and decaying frames. Isn't that the jargon, Bowdler?"

"It's the truth," exclaimed Bowdler, bounding from his chair, "the God's truth of the whole history of this seething mass of tortured millions, condemned to everlasting toil by the accursed laws of this country; and look here, Delfoy," he continued, raising his pipe in the air and lowering at his friend as if he would strike him, "I didn't stop behind here to be insulted, and if you talk of 'jargon,' what of the pestiferous rant of your own tyrannical herd?"

"Sit down, Bowdler. 'Tyrannical herd' is good, excessively good, and as you say 'God's truth.'"

Finding Bowdler slow to be appeased, he added:

"Come, Bowdler, don't be alarmed. I'm with you in spirit, and I want to be more so. I want to help you. I want to give you exactly what you can't get from your own professed backers, and certainly not from my set. I'm talking of cash, Bowdler—hard cash. You can do nothing in politics without hard cash, and that's what I'm talking about now in relation to your toilers and moilers."

Bowdler went back to his seat, and pulled at his pipe violently, desperately, and then, with an oath brutally significant of the familiarity of the pair, invited Delfoy to continue.

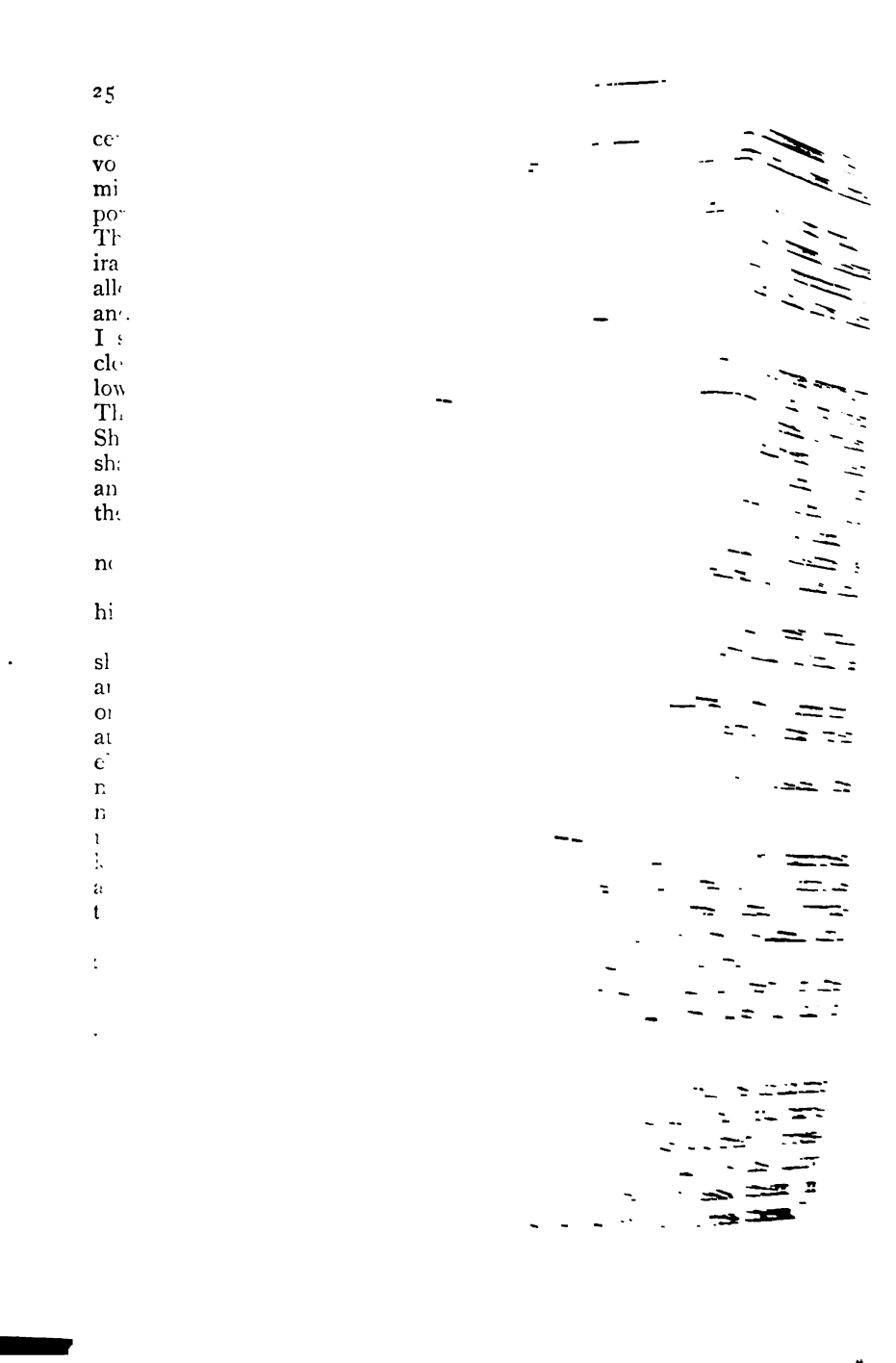
"You were talking to me the other day, Bowdler, of the failure of the last strike you projected, and what it cost your men and your societies, and how little you gained, and how long you would be before that gain recouped your people, and how it was pretty certain that the course of trade would compel the giving up of the little gain you then made before the recouping of the loss was complete. Now that is so—eh, Bowdler?"

Bowdler nodded assent through the smoke, as he lay curled up in his chair, and concentrating all his powers on the line now being unwound for him, but distrusting every word that was uttered until he had weighed it and passed it on as good.

"Now, Bowdler," continued Delfoy, rising and throwing away his cigarette, "the reason you failed was because your resources failed you. You had not laid out your plans on broad enough lines. A strike is an engine you must never have recourse to in a niggardly way. A fragmentary strike is doomed to failure—nobody feels it but those who strike, and they starve. They get tired of starving, and the strike fails. Do you know why bakers never succeed with a strike? They fail because they cannot stop the domestic oven and the biscuit manufacturers and the potato market. Your colliers fail because they strike on the Tyne and leave the Scotch fields and the Welsh fields untouched. Your iron founders fail because they strike in Lanarkshire and let Cleveland supply the market at higher rates. They strike against one set of masters to give bigger profits to the masters they leave alone. That's where you are wrong."

"We know that," moaned Bowdler, "but we cannot help it."

"Exactly," responded Delfoy, and he lit another cigarette, "but it can be helped. Now answer me this: would your toilers and moilers like another penny an hour all round?"



"Ah!" exclaimed Bowdler, with awakening zeal, "ah! *that* I can understand," and Bowdler's eyes glistened, and his large mouth revolved round the stem of his pipe in throes of anticipation.

"And then, Bowdler, you must ascertain," said Delfoy, smiling with self-satisfaction, "two things—the amount of money they have, and the amount they will want to do the thing effectually. Get them to appoint a committee of three or four, call them 'The Campaign Committee' or something of that sort—always have a good-sounding name—who shall settle how much money would be needed to supplement their trade fund, and I will be at hand to give you your answer before they go back to their men. Now, Bowdler, what do you think? Can it be done? Mind, a great strike from end to end of the country, and to stand out till we say 'stop.'"

There was a pause, broken at length by a hard, practical question from the hard-headed Bowdler, with pipe in hand and the keen eyes on Delfoy's face.

"How far can you go, Delfoy?"

"I can go," answered Delfoy, with severe deliberation, "I can go—er—I can go twenty-five thousand pound seven days after the men have come out."

"That won't go far," said Bowdler, "considering the tremendous field you think of tackling."

"No," said Delfoy, solemnly assenting. "It will not go far. But I go further. I'll go right on, pound for pound with the combined societies. I'll—in fact I'll double your sum total of funds up to a quarter of a million, Bowdler. Will that go far enough?"

"I think it will," said Bowdler solemnly, rising and settling his coat around his figure. "I think it will go quite far enough. We haven't got a quarter of a million between us just now, though we ain't far from it. My God," exclaimed Bowdler with bated breath, "what a twister we'll give 'em."

"But there are conditions, Bowdler," said Delfoy, putting his hand upon Bowdler's shoulder and looking him keenly in the face. "I must not be known in this matter."

"Not known!" gasped Bowdler. "Then what are you doing it for?"

Delfoy put his hand on his heart, and looked up with such an air of saintly devotion that Bowdler burst into a loud discordant laugh, but Delfoy continued:

"No, Bowdler, I must not be known in this matter—at

least not until I see fit to declare myself—and there are other conditions. There must be a strike account opened at some private bank, and an established firm of auditors must be appointed to audit the whole of the transactions, to prevent any peculation."

Bowdler looked uncommonly grave as Delfoy continued:

"We must see that not a single penny goes anywhere but to the men who are on strike."

"It won't work if there's nothing going," said Bowdler, shaking his head. "There must be something—not much, but something."

"There shall be something," said Delfoy. "There shall be five thousand from me to you at the end of the business, and one per cent. on all I don't advance below the quarter of a million. That is, if you finish the business when I have advanced only fifty thousand, you get another two thousand. If you break down you get nothing. These are the conditions," exclaimed Delfoy, thrusting Bowdler away as if to have a comprehensive look at him. "And now what do you think of them? Is it agreed, and is it Success?"

Delfoy resumed his seat and his cigar as Bowdler reflected, with his brow overcast, and repeated the terms. Then he said

he thought it would do; then he said he was certain it would do; and finally declared it was a magnificent prospect, and with his fist in the air, and his brow contracted so that the bushy eyebrows came together and made a sort of black wedge wherewith to work the hard head of their owner along his path, he declared, in the language of his class, and with appropriate imprecations concerning coalowners and ironmasters, that he would have the country in flames in a fortnight.

It was nearly two in the morning when Delfoy saw his friend out of the house; and before he closed the door he looked up into the heavens, smiled at the stars, thought it a fine night, and seemed perfectly satisfied with himself and his doings.

Then he wondered where Dubley was, as he bolted the front door himself, wondered whether Dubley had gone to sleep as usual, supposed Dubley had, in Dubley's customary inconsiderate manner, and returned to his library for his final brandy and soda, when he was met by a stranger in the doorway —the doctor.

The doctor was impressive, solemnly so, and consequently disconcerting. Delfoy remembered Dubley's interruption, and the recollection disturbed him. The doctor approached the situation with professional caution, but the substance of his communication was that the honourable member's father would not see the sun rise again. As they were speaking Dubley hurried into the room and announced that his old master had died in his arms calling for his boy.

The announcement fell upon Delfoy with bewildering effect. It struck him, in its contrast with the work of the evening, with that sense of extreme loneliness and of absolute individuality always associated with the passage of the Angel of Death. The hour, the stillness of the night, the hushed voices in conversation, and the appalling fact, which there was no passing by or going behind, all contributed to his unnerving; and he would have fallen but for the steadying hand of the doctor and the ever ready Dubley.

He pushed them aside after the first shock, pressed his hand across his brow, and slowly felt his way by the chairs and table to his seat. The doctor was ready with the brandy, and Delfoy drank deeply and eagerly. Then he rested till his strength revived, and the two stood by respectfully sympathetic.

The shock was the shock of an awakened dread, of a dire superstition, wholly undefined but powerful beyond description,

and the two who stood by eagerly anticipating a revival of power were reverent of this incident of filial suffering.

When he had thoroughly revived he thanked the doctor for his attention with extreme courtesy and every sign of gratitude, instructed Dubley to do everything necessary, and added:

"I must write a letter before I retire for the night."

"No doubt," said the doctor. "Painful, but necessary. May I assure you of my most profound sympathy?"

Delfoy bowed and grasped his hand in silence, and showed him to the door, with expressions of regret that his rest should have been encroached upon. He then returned to his library and wrote the letter. It was to Huckle, and said:

"Instruct brokers to buy pig-iron warrants up to one hundred thousand tons, without disclosing your client, and send word to the Albany how much you have secured by five p.m."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

M. BLANCHÉ.

Two things had struck Mr. Marmaduke Bray as odd in connection with Delfoy's dinner party: the presence of Bowdler and the absence of Alister. It was essentially a company amongst whom Alister would, in the ordinary course of things, have been found, and it was also a gathering in which Bowdler, in Bray's estimation, had no concern. But the fact that the one was there and the other was not indicated to the reflective editor that something was afoot concerning which he was at present in ignorance. It was only natural in these circumstances that Bray should in the pursuit of knowledge call on Alister in the afternoon of the next day on the pretence of ascertaining how things were going on in the commercial world, so far as the perception of the eminent firm of Bamberger & Alister were capable of diagnosing, but really of discovering why Alister was not of the party, and why Bowdler was.

The always accessible Alister received him in his private room, with the white waistcoat and the shining hat, and the supreme confidence in his own importance that usually characterised him. But if the living and abiding representative of the great firm of Bamberger & Alister was full of self-confidence in point of commercial standing he was no match in point of assurance for the editor of *The City Tripod* when it came to oracular opinion or prophetic deliverance.

"Alister, my dear fellow, there's something in the air," said Bray, walking the room and flourishing a new Malacca cane, with a highly ornamental silver top to it. "Something portentous, my dear Alister, is in the air, and I cannot define the cause or the probable consequences. The consequences, my dear Alister, are the essentials—the consequences, and I know of no one who can better assist me than yourself. You, my dear Alister, are *always* sound—*always*."

Alister bowed and swelled out his chest. He had risen as

if to assert himself as soon as Bray began his march and his declamation, and he took his place at the mantelpiece and struck an attitude as indicating proprietorship, and as a protest against the obtrusive manner of his guest. He said nothing, however; he only bowed and looked vastly important.

"Now, Alister, there's an uneasy feeling abroad, we know. There always is. There is always a watchful disposition in the money market. It arises from the common desire on the part of City men to trip other people up and not to get tripped up themselves. Is it not so, Alister? Now tell me, is there anybody in your circle or out of your circle that you think likely to get in a tangle—somebody big, Alister? It must be somebody *big*—some great banker or financial house. It's in the air, Alister; I know it is; I feel it; I find it in my letter bag, and in the countenances I see in the street. Now what do you say, Alister?"

Alister's importance increased in proportion as he became convinced of his ignorance, but he was resolved not to admit himself in any way less well-informed than the presumptuous Bray, and said he regretted he could not divulge facts that had come to his knowledge in confidence.

"Ah yes, no doubt, of course," said Bray, "yes, naturally;" and then, suddenly changing front, he said: "By the way, Alister, I was dining with Delfoy last evening. I expected to see you there. I was disappointed at *not* seeing you there."

Alister winced. He could not help it. His vanity was wounded. He felt he ought to have been at Delfoy's table as Bray had been there. He was decidedly hit, and Bray, remarking it, continued:

"Now, Alister, my friend, can you tell me why Delfoy encourages that fellow Bowdler? He's a *low* fellow. He's a Member of Parliament on sufferance, sent up and paid to do the bidding of a lot of mechanics and day labourers, and there he was at Delfoy's *dinner*-table, and made *much* of, Alister—made a very great *deal* of. Now why *is* that, Alister?"

Bray's notion of the oratorical was comprised in exaggerated emphasis. He fixed on what he conceived to be the telling word in his sentences, and brought himself down upon it with all his might, and with all the power of his large obtrusive voice, and an appropriate wave of the Malacca cane. Alister, however, shrugged his shoulders, expressing his ignorance, and said with apparent indifference:

"I don't choose Delfoy's friends. I suppose he has an

object in cultivating Bowdler," and Alister being a short man, and a pompous man, and a nervous man in the presence of Bray, tilted himself forward on his toes and backwards on his heels as he thus delivered himself.

"Still, Alister, you must admit that Bowdler is a vulgar fellow, and not the sort of person Delfoy should encourage. I confess," continued Bray, with uplifted eyebrows, "to a most profound *repugnance* to the fellow — repugnance, my dear Alister, is the only word. Now Delfoy's is a *grand* nature. He announced last night the purchase of the family estates, and presented the deeds to his father—most affecting scene. I wish you had been there, Alister."

Alister winced again. The blow had struck home, and the little black beads of eyes were unable to keep themselves sedately indifferent to these magniloquent onslaughts. He began to suspect that Bray had received some hint from Delfoy of the actual position of Bamberger & Alister. It was just as this idea had entered his head that a clerk brought him a telegram which nobody in the office could understand. It merely said:

"Julius Bamberger. Care of Bell & Co. Calle de la Reina, Madrid."

Alister turned white as he glanced at it, and then red, recovered himself, told the clerk he would keep it, and looked at his watch.

Every motion was remarked by Bray, but his observations were fruitful only in exciting an intense desire to ascertain the contents of the telegram. He began:

"You see, Alister, the situation was unusually affecting. The old man had been deprived of his patrimony for nearly twenty years I'm told. He wept—positively wept at the sight of the title deeds. Squarely was there. He's going to write about it in *The Frivol.* I'm told it cost two hundred thousand to get the estates back; and the old man is to go down there at once, and spend the rest of his days in peace and plenty."

"Eh?" said Alister, looking up. He had been thinking of other things, and the sonorous chatter of Mr. Marmaduke Bray had been lost to him. The talented editor was about to start another train of thought when Mr John Huckle was announced, and his appearance awakened unusual excitement on the part of Alister, who bowed stiffly as if he had been

a fallen favourite and Huckle the public executioner about to conduct him to the block. Huckle, however, merely grinned his broadest grin, shook hands with both of them at once, giving Bray his left hand, and said, without further preliminaries:

"A word with you, Alister. Only half a minute. There's a good chap." He carried him off by the arm as policemen do criminals—away into the corner of the room where Bray could not hear.

"You know about pig-iron?" said Huckle, sternly examining his friend.

Alister nodded.

"Then give me the names of as many brokers of standing that you know of—here and in the provinces."

"Yes, to be sure," whispered Alister, greatly relieved, and then, with a nod over the shoulder, added: "I'll come out with you and introduce you. I want to get away from—" Another nod over the shoulder, and then, as they moved towards the office, he said aloud:

"Very sorry, Bray, but Huckle wants me to go round the corner. I shall be back soon if you can wait."

Bray said he could not wait, and went with Huckle to the door, while Alister made some communication to his managing clerk, and added ten sovereigns to his available funds before he joined the lawyer.

"Come along," said Alister, as he reached Huckle patiently awaiting him. Then, thinking his manner rather hasty, he added: "That fellow Bray is a perfect nuisance. He annoys me by his preaching and his questioning."

"It's his trade," said Huckle, "and I never complain of a man for working at his own anvil. We're all, more or less, bores to everybody else, my boy."

Huckle looked at Alister curiously, and the little black eyes, more than ever on the watch now, wondered what Bray had been saying to Huckle about him.

There was not much time for reflection, however. They dived up a court, and up a much worn staircase and into a small office, and thence into a comparatively large room, where Messrs. Lohman & Last conducted themselves as iron brokers. Mr. Lohman, who was a young and very large German, was reading *The Tripod* at a writing-table with nothing on it otherwise but an inkstand, a quill pen, and a piece of blotting paper; and Mr. Last, who was an unusually thin English-

man, was sitting on the edge of an adjoining table, chewing a toothpick and rattling something metallic in his trousers pocket. Neither of them seemed very busy, but they were consulting what course they should adopt when the afternoon market opened—whether they should go with the bulls or the bears, or stand by and watch events.

The firm of Lohman & Last was one of those international combinations which ensured a patriotic appearance for each in his competition, combined with an equal share of profit whether the transaction was consistent with a patriotic sentiment or not. If it were a case of English rails sent to Germany, then it was Last's doings, and if it were German girders put up in Great Britain, while destitute English furnacemen were being subscribed for by a benevolent public because they chose to strike, then it was Lohman's doing; but the balance sheet made no distinction, and they divided the proceeds of each transaction with an eminently international conscience.

"Now," said Alister, "I've a line for you. My friend Mr. Huckle has a client who wants to buy pig. How's the warrant market?"

"Very dull, very stupid," said the German.

"Flat," said the Englishman.

"Should he buy?" asked Alister.

"That's exactly what we don't know," said Last, with his hat on the back of his head, as if it had been thrown there by the creases in his forehead, the work of doubt and perplexity.

"But you can buy?" asked Huckle.

"Buy," shouted Last, "of course we can buy. Thousands!"

"Then listen to me," said Huckle. "I'm a lawyer, and know nothing of this business, but I've a client who has instructed me to buy, and I come to you, on the introduction of my friend Alister, and request you to buy. Now, what I want to know is: will you buy?"

"Unquestionably," said Last, who immediately ceased chewing his toothpick and became exceedingly business-like. "How much?"

"Well, it seems to me," said Huckle, "that the question now is: how far can you go in the direction of a hundred thousand tons without exciting the market?"

Lohman & Last concealed their emotion at the prospect, and said it was a question that could be determined only by trying the market, but that if orders were telegraphed to their

provincial correspondents in small lots perhaps the whole could be secured by four o'clock.

"At what price?"

The price at that particular moment was thirty-seven. They thought the buying could be done under thirty-eight.

"Then do it," said Huckle. "There's my address, and let me know by four-fifteen how much you have got, and the price. Mind, not a minute later than four-fifteen."

This piece of business transacted, it only remained for Huckle to thank his friend and leave him. Alister then hailed a hansom cab, and next morning by ten o'clock he was seated in a barber's shop in a Parisian suburb, having his hair cut as short as a Parisian barber could cut it. He was dressed in bright blue check trousers, an open waistcoat, and a jacket to match, a rigid shirt collar, and an immense blue and white tie. His hat was the tallest and flattest brimmed hat he could find, and he had become M. Blanché.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

M. BLANCHÉ TAKES A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW.

ALISTER had improved on Delfoy's suggestion. He did not pack a bag with forty sovereigns in it. He kept ten five-pound notes in his pocket, and these, with the ten sovereigns he had procured from his managing clerk, together with the loose cash he happened to have about him, were sufficient for his purpose. Compromising papers had been long since destroyed, and when he hailed the hansom cab he made straight for the tidal train, and next morning he walked out of the Paris railway station without a particle of luggage. He breakfasted and went to an outfitter's, bought a suit of clothes of pronounced local colour and put them on, packed his old clothes in brown paper, and left them "to be called for," without the slightest intention of claiming them, and then he had his head shaved. Next morning he was on the other side of the Pyrenees.

The journey had been a season of reflection to M. Blanché. Drawn with irresistible force by the golden loadstone in the bank at Madrid, he had not delayed a moment on the road. The stout little M. Blanché, with shaven head and the two days' beard, ate and drank at the *buffet*, smoked cigarettes, riveted his eyes on the French newspapers as if he could read them, and never spoke but to say "*pardon*" and "*merci*" all the way through France. He became braver and oilier and more like the people he travelled with every hour of the day, but was as deaf as a post when they spoke to him.

He had become an absconding bankrupt before his time. He looked fiercely at madame opposite to him as he thought of it, and madame imagined his scowl was directed at the pet rabbit she had developed from an unusually large pocket, where the rabbit burrowed when the train pulled up. Madame was indignant with monsieur, and monsieur, thinking of Delfoy, scowled the more.

It had become clear to Alister that, in representing himself to be Julius Bamberger among the bankers of Spain, he would

absorb in his own person the entire firm of Bamberger & Alister. If he did not represent himself to be Julius Bamberger he could not possess himself of the competency provided for him by the foresight of Delfoy. Then the possibility forced itself upon him that perhaps the money had not been lodged, or had been withdrawn, or would, by some new device of Delfoy's, be withheld from him. His imagination created innumerable pitfalls for himself, all testifying by their wildness and ingenuity to the overpowering influence Delfoy exerted upon his actions and upon his very life. He had been attracted to him for years, doing his bidding with the submission of a mesmerised subject, and now he was being projected a distance of a thousand miles by the same incomprehensible force. He felt that during these past years he had been treated by Delfoy as madame treated the rabbit. He had been let out to nibble a piece of lettuce for a moment or two, and now he was being thrust into the big pocket called Spain, out of the way of the police.

"And the twenty-five thousand?"

That dreadfully urgent and constantly recurring question was again upon him; and he grinned a sardonic grin as he reflected that if he found Delfoy had played him false he would return and denounce him, take the punishment his repentance or revenge would lead him to, and live honourably ever after.

The reflection that he would repent and face justice if the twenty-five thousand pounds were not at his command afforded him so much moral comfort that he smiled at the rabbit on madame's lap, and again became the vain, confident, reckless Alister who strutted the floor of the Baltic coffee-house and drew bills for thousands without a thought of the morrow.

But Delfoy had not played him false. He knew better than to do that. Delfoy was an unconscionable rascal, but he was also a model of prudence; and prudence required that Alister should announce to the merchants and bankers of the City of London that he was a scoundrel. The business was done so effectually that M. Blanché was actually dining in the finest hotel in Madrid, with the money all placed in safety, before London had awakened to the fact that Bamberger & Alister was no more. All that had happened within the precincts of the City at five o'clock on that day when he cashed the bill of exchange in Madrid was an uneasy feeling on the part of Mr. Alister's managing clerk, arising from the continued absence of his chief, and his want of instructions as to the precise form

of excuse or apology he had to make for the unusual occurrence. The fatal fourth of the month, however, came, and Bamberger & Alister was announced to have failed for two millions.

M. Blanché read the impressive fact in *The Times* as he sipped his after-dinner coffee, and was much elated by the reflection that his proceedings had provoked a panic. Complacently regarding the outburst of commercial indignation at a safe distance, he experienced quite a glow of satisfaction at the magnitude of his defalcation, and the extent and variety of its consequences. He could hardly have felt more vain if he had made a couple of millions instead of losing them, or, to be more particular, in causing other people to lose the imposing sum.

His complacency, however, was to some extent disturbed by reference in a leading article on his flight to the action of Mr. Delfoy, M.P., in the House of Commons, who, it appeared, had animadverted upon the enormity of a civilised country giving refuge to criminal defaulters. The writer of the article incidentally referred to the fact that the honourable member was himself a loser by the bankrupt firm, and might be regarded as representative of the whole body of creditors.

M. Blanché boiled with indignation at this "perfidy," as he called it, but thought of the twenty-five thousand and cooled down.

Calmer reflection led him to the pig-iron market, where he found it slightly disturbed by rumours of dissatisfaction among the men, and following the ideas that his conversation with Bray had awakened, he sought for mention of Bowdler, and found he had been haranguing a miner's meeting on over-production. All this was sweet distraction to M. Blanché, whose thoughts again reverted to the twenty-five thousand, and he was almost content.

A millionaire in the sense of catastrophe, and a subject for Parliamentary animadversion by his fellow-conspirator, M. Blanché settled down to sober reflection on the situation. He observed that several other failures of some magnitude were expected, and one or two small incidents had already been chronicled, but these had occurred on the Stock Exchange over the Great Coradell "boom." The subject was interesting to M. Blanché on personal grounds, for he was not only a Great Coradell director, but had dealt with the firm of brokers that had gone by the board, and he

chuckled as he reflected that his creditors and not he would be the losers by the failure.

The Great Coradell seemed to be attracting considerable attention. The bears had been caught, and everybody was very much surprised to discover that the house of Heritage had put all its strength into the matter and intended to hold. Great Coradell was to be wiped out of the speculative market, and everyone of the directors except Philip discovered that he was no longer a shareholder because he had oversold. They could not deliver anything like the number of shares they had disposed of, nor could they procure them for delivery at any price. The register was accordingly denuded of all but the house of Heritage, and the fortune made on the rising market had reduced the cost of Great Coradell to them to less than nothing. The consternation of the Right Hon. Peter was beyond description. He was saved from bankruptcy by his sister, but he had to leave the Government from "continued indisposition," so the newspapers said.

The newspaper euphemisms will be a delightful study to the archæological pedant of the future. Could anything be more odd than the way harsh truth is wrapped up in these days of whitewashed sepulchres and social blindness? How desperately anxious we all are not to see the seamy side of things, how we turn our nodding heads until everything we see is glorious, and strive our hardest to believe that the thing we hope for is the thing that is. Of course flowers are more pleasant to contemplate than offal, but for all that society should remember that the Right Hon. Peter was a scoundrel.

All these incidents were exceedingly interesting to M. Blanché, sipping coffee at a safe distance from the bewildering scene, and in the calm assurance that his future was one of peace and comparative plenty. He resolved to keep his eye on the pig-iron market, and as he made the resolution the little beady black eyes twinkled maliciously.

In the meantime he took a walk in the Prado, and being mindful of the instructions of the guide book, that he had studied with much earnestness during the period anterior to his flight, he was gracious to a lantern-jawed stranger of mature years, sallow complexion, and heavy black eyebrows, who bowed to him effusively and offered him a cigar. The stranger spoke English, and perhaps this had something to do with the graciousness of the not unsuspicious M. Blanché.

"Excuse the liberty," said the stranger, "but I saw you in the bank to-day. Just arrived, I presume?"

"Yes," said M. Blanché, settling himself in an attitude of importance, in which the walking-stick played a distinguished part. It seemed as if M. Blanché was always to be under the necessity of asserting himself by an imposing attitude, and having struck the stick on the ground twice and settled his arms akimbo, he inquired: "And you, sir, have you been here long?"

"I've been here five years, and I find it a most agreeable place. It wants the bustle of Threadneedle Street of course, but you can't have everything in this world."

They smoked awhile in contemplation of this profound reflection, but after a few pulls the stranger advanced a step in the direction of acquaintanceship. He remarked upon the novelty of Spanish manners, the rigour of their prejudices, the ease with which they could be overcome with knowledge, and offered to place his experience at the newcomer's disposal.

"Do you propose to stay long here?" he asked in conclusion.

"I hope not."

"Naturally," said the stranger, "we all feel that way, but we stay nevertheless." Then, turning upon his new friend, he said with a whimsical air: "*I* can leave, I've managed matters. I *prefer* to stay. You see I've made a little arrangement, and I now act as an intermediary."

"Indeed?" said M. Blanché.

"Yes," said the stranger, with a mechanical smile that seemed rather hard to work, "an intermediary. You see, a man comes here suddenly. He doesn't leave the necessary messages for his friends and relatives, and he doesn't care to write. He has his reasons, no doubt, for this apparent neglect or want of courtesy, and yet he desires to communicate, and he may need some little business transacted in which the *bankers* may play a part."

The stranger smiled the mechanial smile as he uttered the word "bankers"—an insinuating, confidence-working smile, as referring to something strong and solid as apart from his lean and not too well-dressed self.

"The banker," he said, "can *transfer*, if necessary."

The stranger drew himself up and repeated the smile and waited. There was no response, and he continued:

"I have not introduced myself," he said. "Let me give

you my card. My name is Newmans, formerly of the firm of Barcham, Newmans & Thirl, solicitors, and I am recommended by your bankers. I refer you to your bankers."

Again the smile meandered over the man's countenance and worked itself off.

There was another pause, broken again by Mr. Newmans, who protested he was anxious to assist a newcomer; and remarking that M. Blanché's circumstances were well known, advised him to assume his own name and put himself under the protection of the authorities.

"Consult your banker," said the stranger. "He'll put you right."

This advice was accompanied by many nods and winks, the purport of which could in no wise be mistaken, and M. Blanché, who at the first blush was inclined to be indignant, became quite mollified when his new acquaintance said with a reassuring bow:

"You should understand, sir, that with resources such as I presume are at your disposal you will be quite a person of consideration here."

This was gratifying. But how did Mr. Newmans know of his resources. Alister asked him.

"I have no positive knowledge," said Newmans, "but I was in the bank when you called, and I remarked the deference with which you were received. It is not the practice of bankers to treat the needy with deference, sir," he added, with an accent on the "sir" that thrilled the nerves of the delighted Alister. "I observed the smile of Mr. Frew the chief cashier on bowing you out," continued Newmans, "and adjudge from that that your balance is not inconsiderable. It's a sure token," he said, with a bow and a shrewd look, as if he would indicate a desire to worship the possessor of so much wealth as he presumed Alister to have at his command.

Such is the effect of judicious flattery that the old Alister reasserted himself, repudiated the new M. Blanché, took Mr. Newmans home to his hotel, and discussed men and things in a spirit of hope and confidence. In the course of the conversation they discovered they had some ambitions in common, and that their experiences curiously intertwined. Mr. Newmans saw business looming in the future, and his visits were from time to time renewed, until all suspicion was dissipated and a perfect understanding was established.

Alister continued his review of home affairs during the

next few days by the aid of the newspapers, and discovered fresh consolation day by day. Bowdler, he found, was hard at work preaching the power of the strike as a means of procuring what he called "a just wage," and zest was given to Alister's appetite for news on discovering that Mr. Philip Heritage had begun a campaign against Bowdler among the member's constituents. The City crisis was increasing in intensity, and the threatened labour trouble appeared to add to the commercial depression. References appeared in the journals commending the young orator for his vigour and courage, but these were the compliments of sympathy rather than the expression of hope. Close reasoning and sound economics are, we all know, useless for dissipating aspirations founded in the belief that the time is at hand when there shall be no small beer.

But Alister did not reason; he merely remarked that a strike was threatened and that Bowdler was at work. He was convinced that Delfoy was at the bottom of it, and in default of participating in the profits he thirsted for revenge.

Among other items of news that attracted his attention was a small paragraph in the fashionable intelligence to the effect that Mrs. Heritage had had a relapse at her house in Cavendish Square.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE RELAPSE.

It all happened in an hour, and in the middle of the night.

The convalescent had been out driving when a letter was put into her hand by a strange man as she passed from her carriage to her doorway. There was no commotion, no apparent intrusion, everything was commonplace and ordinary, except that this manner of delivering a letter was unusual. The blood surged back to her heart as she took the letter, and the two girls who observed the incident in every particular spoke only to each other about it and were concerned each in her own way.

They were alone during the evening. Heritage dined out, and Philip was still pursuing Bowdler. A painful restraint was upon the mother and her girls. There was an unusual brightness about Muriel's eyes and a nervous watchfulness in her manner, a sudden starting at the least noise and then a laugh and a fearful glance, as if suspicious of observation.

But nothing was said save the trivial and commonplace, and while the girls wondered (in the midst of reflections on the fashions and of comments on the eccentricities of the day) what terrible cause had brought about this strange manner in their mother, the poor wretch of anxious nights and suffering days, of fearful penitence, groaned as she laughed, and prayed for death and oblivion as she discussed a flower in a bonnet or criticised a neighbour's robe.

The night came, but no rest—only solitude, and the furnace of her thoughts still growing in intensity racked her hour by hour.

Heritage would have left her undisturbed, as was his custom when returning home late or unexpectedly; but the light came from under her door, and, as he listened, doubting whether to enter and see that all was safe, he heard the laboured scratching of a pen.

The unusual in the stillness of the night excites the imagina-

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tion. The creaking of a stair, the flapping of a blind, the moaning of the wind in the chimney, or the hurried skirr of a mouse conjures up a myriad fears and makes the strongest halt. This busy pen was most unquieting. Clearly Muriel was awake, and writing with determination.

He had come upstairs in the darkness, and unattended, as was his custom; for his old tendency to cultivate individuality, and resist as much as possible the intrusion of domestics upon his movements, had grown upon him, and had been developed to the verge of the misanthropic. His rooms were prepared for him to be used or not as he chose, but he preferred that none should wait for him or upon him, if only what he needed was within his command by a little trouble. Thus he was alone in the darkness in the hall, with the line of light under the door and the sound of the hurrying pen. Then a pause of silence ensued that weighed upon him like a leaden pall. What should he do? He could not withdraw with this strange and inexplicable thing continuing; and yet he must not enter suddenly as if to surprise her. There was a sound—a groan—a sob—a stifled cry as if for help, and he no longer doubted.

"Yes, Muriel, are you in any trouble?" he asked as he stepped quickly into the room.

In an instant she was on her feet, with a scream that rang through the house and seemed to cut the heart in two as with hot steel, so terrible was her aspect. Then she stood before the table at which she had been writing, with her hands behind her, tearing the papers she had written, and with her eyes upon her husband menacingly as she laboured to destroy.

As he stood (ready, but determined) he saw her put out her hand cunningly and overturn the inkstand upon the wreck of papers on her writing-pad, and then when she had smeared the ink with her hands she turned and laughed at the wreck, and turned again and laughed at Heritage, and smeared her inky hands one upon the other and upon her fresh white robe, as if she had been a foolish child.

"Come, Muriel," said Heritage, advancing. "You're not well. Let me advise you," and he took her by the arm and then by the waist, and finally he had her hand in his, as if to fondle her, with his arm about her—and she was safe!

"Come," he said, "you are very cold. You should have been asleep, as I have often seen you sleeping, gently and unconscious of my being near you, and—"

"No more," she cried, "no more," and then she shook her head and wailed again, "no more."

Some of the household were by this time without, whispering doubtfully as to their movements. She made signs to Heritage to send them away—mouing at the doorway. When they had been sent to their rooms and the door was closed she began to search the floor eagerly, and clasp her hands and rock herself with painful moanings, sitting on the side of her bed.

The pain that Heritage felt was hidden by his fond solicitude beneath a quiet, sympathetic manner, eager to secure her rest. He took a fur-lined cloak and wrapped her in it, led her to a chair, and called her maid, who washed her hands. She laughed at this, said it was so queer, and splashed around the water in her childish mood; and then in deep distress she'd seem to cry, but shed no mending tears.

They were alone again, she lying in her bed apparently at rest, and he sitting by her side, holding her hand and wondering what misfortune had befallen her, how this new attack had been caused, and how it could be mended. Her eyes were closed, but a strange firm line about her mouth showed she was alert.

Presently she turned aside, and looking on him tenderly, said, "Oh, my good husband," and shook her head mournfully, as if in such misery as hers goodness was of no avail. Then he kissed her and bade her try to sleep.

She said she would try, and asked for chlorodyne, and taking the proper dose, stretched out her hand for the phial, with a strange look in her eyes as they rested on his face, and with the hard lines about her mouth drawn tightly down.

She closed her eyes again, and there was silence for a time; but the mind was working still, resolving impossible problems and threading insurmountable tangles in the brain backwards and forwards in maddening perplexity. Then she suddenly opened her eyes, and pointing to the table where all the torn and blotted writing was, she said in a hoarse whisper:

"Look, look, my husband, my Morris, who has been so good to me. Look, there it is. I see it. Just there! The ink has run across the page, but still no ink could blurr the horrid words from out my brain."

Heritage looked where she pointed, and there, sure enough, was a folded letter lying on the verge of the heap of fragments; but thinking she was merely raving, he tried to quiet her, and

said the papers could wait till the morning, and urged her to sleep.

"No!" she said. "No; I'll never sleep again. I never can, not even when I'm dead; and oh, that I could die and leave you free, even if I wandered for ever and ever through the earth and through the air. Look at it. See! There's a devil holding it in his hand and offering it to you. See! See!"

She pushed him towards the table, and nothing that he could do availed to pacify her. At length he rose to take the letter from the pile, when quick as thought she seized the chlorodyne and had it hidden before his face was turned towards her.

"Now, Morris, now read it, and say what I must do," she said eagerly. "Say I must die, Morris, and then you needn't tell Philip."

He was sorely perplexed; her mind was so clearly out of balance with her strange malady, which only sleep could cure, that he thought to quiet her by indifference, and handed her the letter unopened and unread.

"No," she cried, spreading it open and returning it. "Read it."

It was not a letter; merely ten or a dozen lines of hard matter-of-fact words, wholly insufficient, one would think, to have so desperate a result, but to her it was the final turn of the rack.

"Your son," it ran, "is interfering with my plans. You must tell him to discontinue his speeches. I insist upon it. If you do not check him, I shall see him myself and make him understand you are on the edge of a precipice, and that your future requires that he obey me. G. D."

She watched him as he read with an eager unnatural brightness in her eyes akin to delight: she was experiencing the ecstasy of desperation. Heritage flushed with anger as he read the dastard threat, but not a word or even look escaped him to accelerate the fever of her brain or mar the road to sleep, her only medicine. He put the letter down, and sat beside the bed again, without a word. He was only a little sterner in the features, somewhat nervous, and for the moment unready for speech.

She moved her hand from underneath the pillow and with drew the chlorodyne, concealed within her grasp.

"Come," she said, "you understand." Then hoarsely, as she held the opiate in her hand away from him, she said: "Look! Now I'll die, and Philip will not know. You'll promise me you will not tell him?"

He heaved a sigh and trembled as he turned upon her, still without a word, and wrested the poison from her grasp.

Then, as she struggled to regain possession of her hope, he said:

"No, Muriel, no; that is not the way to mend a wrong. See, I hold you by the wrists. You cannot move, and must needs submit."

She looked at him defiantly and fearfully. The terror of the hunted thing was upon her, and she seemed to regain some fragment of her reason in fear of chastisement.

"Let us be calm, Muriel. Let us reason."

"No, no!" she cried. "I have done wrong and cannot live. I have done wrong, and I must die, that you may live and still be happy once again."

"Do you think," he asked, "that I could buy happiness if it were purchasable at such a price? Your misery, distress, and cruel suffering cannot ease my pain—my pain for you. We must be merciful, my Muriel, to each other and to ourselves."

She looked at him with her eyes strained, and with fearful shrinking from him, not understanding the quiet temper of his remonstrance.

"Your story is not new to me, Muriel," he continued. "I have known it long ago. The name is a revelation to me, and a terrible one. It has unnerved me for the moment, but I see clearly now. Your story has been a secret in the past, let it be a secret still. Let it be buried in the still hours of the night, never to be recalled. There are some things that one must bear for the sake of others. It is not for me, who call myself a Christian, to flout the Godhead by vaunting the hypocrisy of honour because another has deceived à woman of pure heart and infinite devotion. You were silent when you should have spoken, and, must I say it? were to blame."

He said it firmly, and yet with gentleness, as a thing of truth should be always spoken when the dread necessity has arisen, and then he waited as the quivering soul shrank and cowered in its agony; but when the woman groaned and hid her face upon the pillow he went on in tenderness and love, and with his strong right hand upon her bruised shoulder:

"But I remember always that your temptation was great. It was overwhelming, for the love of your children was supreme. I forgive you. I have forgiven you long ago, because your heart is pure, and ever has been so, because your life has been a life of devotion and self-denial, an embodiment, as far as these days seem able to afford, of all that is Christlike in poor human nature. I say, again, we must be merciful to each other, and we must be merciful to ourselves."

Again he paused, and in response there came a sob, but nothing more.

"Conventional custom preaches otherwise," he went on more calmly, as if reasoning with himself, "but we are not to be guided by conventional laws. In times that are past there would have been two ways of ending this matter—suicide and the duel. I confess to having experienced a momentary impulse to adopt them; but oceans of blood and eternal self-immolation will not destroy a fact, and I cannot think it God's will that anguish of mind should be made perpetual because that once upon a time a man played the villain! We, Muriel, have to do with human faith and human hope and human trust, such as we have known it—each with the other. Let the thing be dead, and leave the rest to me."

The grateful tears began to flow as she hid her face upon the pillow, and the sobs came thick and fast, and brought with them healing to the harried nerves.

At last in very deed the thing was dead; for the phantom that arose from the ashes in the little room in Torrington Square was now no more for ever.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MR. MAWLL OF MADRID.

MORRIS HERITAGE was accustomed to wait upon events—not blindly, but with discretion. He used to say that "things happen," and that the wisdom of man was displayed more in appropriating what came towards him than in pursuing the distant prize. Action, he knew, would be necessary in the near future, for he recognised the impossibility of remaining passive in the face of malignant competition such as the blotted letter had disclosed. Philip's activity in the north, he conceived, was unwise, because in the absence of a settled plan a false step might be taken, and perhaps it would be better if Delfoy were led to believe he had been obeyed. He therefore wrote a brief note to Philip, asking him to make no fresh engagements, but that when he had completed those to which he was pledged he should return and confer. Then he considered the position, and proceeded to form a programme, which with Morris Heritage was a work of time.

He had come to the conclusion that it would be better in the interest of society if Geoffrey Delfoy were made incapable of doing further harm, and he proposed to himself the task of preventing him. Some may condemn this resolution as being the product of a revengeful spirit, and as a triumph of the baser instincts of Heritage's nature; but although it would be ridiculous to pretend that his determination was the expression of his love for Delfoy, yet it is absolutely true that he was impelled by something more than a personal feeling of detestation, and was persuaded that what he proposed to do should be done because it accorded with the fitness of things. He did not often appropriate to himself the office of Justiciar, but when he did he was firm in his purpose and unceasing in his efforts until his task was accomplished. The personality of his Muriel's evil genius had been unknown to him until he had read the blotted letter; and now that the man was disclosed the cowardly threat unrolled itself before his eyes in letters of

flame, and shaped themselves into the form of a sword, with the hilt to his hand.

But although the object was clear the way to achieve it was still in embryo. A week of thought had not discovered to him a single step that he could take with any but ephemeral effect. He experienced all the disappointment of the patriot conspirator enclosed by four stone walls, with the chagrin associated with the knowledge that the walls were imaginary and that an open door led nowhere.

He resolved to take a week's rest from the subject. It had become a cause of irritation, and he had not yet talked with Philip. This would be a distraction, and Philip was expected home that day. He was conscious of the futility of this course, but he had no other, and just as he was endeavouring to find consolation in it a letter was brought to him that was more of an enigma than the problem he had set himself. It ran as follows :—

"DEAR SIR,—I have come expressly from the Continent to see you on a matter of personal concern to yourself, and of special interest to the enterprise of your son in the north. If you grant me five minutes of your time you will be able to determine whether or not I have made a wrong estimate of the importance of the communication I desire to make to you. I wait without, and am,—Your obedient servant,

"SILAS MAWLL."

The bearer was described as a thin, white-haired man, with a white necktie, and dressed in black. He seemed to be a clergyman, and Morris Heritage supposed a collector of subscriptions, but he said he would see him, and anticipated amusement in the way in which his visitor would connect the terms of his letter with the objects of a philanthropic society. As Morris Heritage had not seen his visitor talking with the outlawed Alister on the Prado he was not struck with the fact that his hair had apparently become white, and that his garments and general appearance had much changed for the better. Mr. Newmans, however, had assumed what he described as his "missionary" appearance and his "missionary" name, as, notwithstanding his boast that he was free to return to London, there were reasons still extant that made it advisable he should remain unknown. So he dressed as a clergyman, and lived in Soho. He did not leave Heritage long in doubt

either as to his mission or his principal. Speaking with studied suavity, he said:

"The activity of your son in the north has induced me to come a long distance to make a communication to you."

"Then I do not wish to hear it," exclaimed Heritage, with a heat that was most unusual with him. He was on the instant fired with indignation, not at what had been said, but at what he believed was going to be said to him. He connected the calm, judicious, and well-considered statement of Mr. Newmans, *alias* Mawll, with the threat of Geoffrey Delfoy, and he was afraid that the whole of the ungracious incident that he was endeavouring to forget was to be obtruded upon his notice by this obviously harsh and certainly unwelcome stranger. Despite the eminently respectable garments and the white hair there was a callous twist about the mouth of Mr. Mawll that indicated a sinister intention. His words came out hard and precise, as if they were bricks being ejected from a mould. He had a good deal of the manner of his deceased partner Mr. Barcham, of Barcham, Newmans & Thirl.

The retort by Heritage was somewhat disconcerting to Mawll, who drew himself together and said, with a keen, impressive look:

"You surely misunderstand me, sir. If I cannot claim to be a friend of yours, I am certainly not an enemy, as you appear to suppose. It would be unfortunate if you refused to hear me. Give me leave but for five minutes, and then, if you will, show me the door; but do not, I beg of you for your own sake, do so before you have heard me."

This was quite an impassioned appeal for Mr. Mawll, and he stood with his left hand held forth, eagerly looking for encouragement. It was slow to come, but it came at length. Heritage concluded that it was better he should learn the worst than remain in ignorance of whatever villainy might be afoot. So he waved his visitor to a chair, told him to proceed, and be brief, and then sat back in his seat and waited, a perfect marvel of watchful resistance. Mr. Mawll proceeded with alacrity:

"We," he said, "that is my principal and myself, approve of your son's purpose, and wish him success; but feeling that he is not going the right way to work, I have come to you to submit my scheme, ask for your approval and assistance, and proffer my co-operation in any way you may think expedient."

Heritage nodded. He did no more. He was still watchful and receptive.

"Your son," continued Mawll, "is attacking Bowdler. That's the wrong man. He is merely an instrument of a stronger yet more vulnerable man."

Mr. Mawll paused, and Newmans of the Prado shone out through the rouge and the powder on the sallow skin of his face, and glimmered round the false eyebrows and patriarchal wig.

Mr. Mawll had thrown out his first strong card.

"Who is that stronger and more vulnerable man?" inquired Heritage, with an effort.

The armour of his suspicion had been pierced, and the stranger of the Prado continued:

"A man of great position here, a Member of Parliament named Delfoy."

The second card was down, and the hot blood rushed to the face of Heritage. He became eager.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"I will tell you," said the visitor, and he coughed behind a baggy black kid glove, more at his ease, and prepared to deliver something in the shape of dogmatic teaching.

Heritage, for his part, was confronted by a kaleidoscope of possible combinations. Up to this moment he had been troubled with the fear that the terrible letter of his discomfiture had in some way originated with the man before him. Now he conceived it possible that a counterfoil had been accidentally put into his hands with which to attack the sender of the letter.

"My principal," said Mawll, with another cough—a modest, bashful cough, suggestive of humiliation and dejection—"is in an unfortunate position, and he desired me to say that if by any chance you, Mr. Heritage, happen to have been a loser by his laches, you should be informed that this Delfoy is the origin of his ruin, and that in his punishment, which your son is now fruitlessly endeavouring to achieve, you will find a means of recouping yourself of all that you may have lost as a financial house through my principal, if you should have lost anything."

This declaration ran in a consistent diminuendo of abject submission, and Heritage smiled as he said:

"You have not yet told me who is your principal."

"Mr. Alister," said the visitor, "of Bamberger & Alister, an absconded bankrupt, I regret to say, driven to the ignominious position by this same man Delfoy," exclaimed the visitor, with reviving courage.

Heritage laughed at this explosion of virtuous indignation, and reverted to a sceptical condition of mind. His serious fears were at an end, although he had not yet seen a road for himself in the mazy paths of the suggested commercial roguery.

"Come, now, let us see where we have got to," he said. "My son, you say, is fighting a subordinate, and you want me to attack the leader. Why?"

"Because you can crush both with scarcely an effort. This great strike in the iron industry, about which your son is so eloquent—and allow me to say, sir, there are some very fine passages in his speeches—is the creation of Delfoy for market speculation, and Bowdler is his tool, perhaps his unconscious tool, but we think not."

Heritage was about to interrupt, when the black kid glove was upheld and the stranger continued:

"We have conferred, sir, long and anxiously on this subject, and we know that Delfoy bought heavily—most heavily, sir — more heavily than any man would buy in ordinary circumstances, a week before the strike was dreamt of. Mr. Alister, my principal, introduced the broker. Further, sir, we know that Bowdler was in intimate conference with Delfoy the evening before, and with Mr. Bray the editor of *The Tripod*. Further, we know that the buying has been going on, and we have reason to know that he will not commence selling for several weeks."

"Well?" said Heritage, as the vehement declaration stopped.

"Well, sir," said Mawll, in a slightly injured tone, "it's very simple, sir. Bowdler can stop the strike, and Bowdler can be bought. Bowdler has his price, sir."

Mr. Mawll waited with a feeling amounting almost to indignation, as he observed no responsive scintillation of delight in Heritage's face as this wonderful scheme was disclosed. It was not within the compass of Mr. Mawll's experience of life that a man should feel repugnance at the bare idea of bribery in any form, and since he was proposing merely to bribe one rogue to betray another, coupled with a distinct and certain advantage, he regarded Heritage with amazement.

Heritage walked the room much more agitated than his visitor imagined. The temptation was a strong one, and it was not a question with Heritage whether he should act upon the information given to him, but whether he should use it in the way suggested, or in some manner more consonant with

his notions of propriety. His chief anxiety, however, was to assure himself that the statements made to him were true. The manner of turning them to account was a secondary consideration. While he was reflecting on the best answer to give his visitor the arrival of Philip was announced; and this event hastened his decision. Said he, in the firm, decisive tones in which he was accustomed to deliver himself on matters of commerce:

"Generally speaking, I entertain your scheme, but you have something to do before I can promise you support. You have to ascertain whether your scoundrel will do what you require, and what he would want for doing it; and then you have to contrive a scheme by which you can ensure that he will not take your money and laugh at you."

This announcement was received with eager nodding by Mr. Mawll, who seemed to be checking off the points gleefully. Then he said he was sure of Bowdler, knew him well, was once his dearest friend, had done business with him, and added:

"May I ask you to kindly cast your eye over that document? The amount is blank, but you may take it that, when the amount is filled in to Bowdler's satisfaction, Bowdler will sign that paper."

Heritage took the paper, and his visitor watched him as he read it with the complacency of a man who is convinced he has produced a creditable piece of work. It ran:—

"SIR,—As regards a bill for the sum of
pounds, drawn by me at thirty days' date, and accepted by Messrs. , I acknowledge that this acceptance will not be recoverable by me, or by anyone to whom it may be transferred, unless the strike in the iron smelting trade and the coal trade now existing ceases throughout the United Kingdom within fourteen days from this date; and in the event of the strike not so ceasing, I undertake to return the bill within twenty-one days from this date, or twelve days before the due date."

"Yes," said Heritage, handing back the document, "it's fair, but it will not hold a man of Bowdler's stamp. He will take the bill to Delfoy, who will outbid us, if your statements are true."

"No," said Mawll decisively, "no, he will not take it to Delfoy, because he will not run the risk of exposure. This

letter is never to be given up by you in any event. If what you think probable, but which I say is impossible, were to occur, you would have twelve days in which to sell to Delfoy at the still further enhanced price, and you would at your own time cause this letter to be published, with the facts of the negotiations and Delfoy's part in them, and ensure the political and commercial ruin of both of them at the very time they were loaded with warrants. That is my case; and I propose, if you please, to have a banker's name on the bill—not yours—and I propose thirty thousand pounds as the bribe, of which, I should tell you, I propose to have five thousand myself. You will find me open and above board, sir," added Mr. Mawll, with precipitation.

Heritage laughed as he read the letter again. He was obliged to admit that Mr. Mawll of Madrid was an expert in setting traps for rogues, and said he would carry out the scheme if its details were observed exactly as they had been proposed.

"I knew you would," remarked Mawll, with harsh emphasis, "I was sure of it." And then, suddenly changing his tone to one of insinuating appeal, he said: "Did I hear your son had arrived? May I have the pleasure of shaking him by the hand? It would inspire me, sir. May I?"

The privilege was conceded. The compliments were overpowering, and Mr. Mawll left the house muttering "wonderful," "surprising," "extraordinary," and other exclamations provoked by the secret pleasure he experienced in contemplating the son of Muriel Balmain, formerly a client of Barcham, Newmans & Thirl.

Few comprehend the charm of revolving in the mind a professional secret; and in this instance Mr. Mawll had the peculiar pleasure of knowing more about the two people he had been talking with, in one important respect, than they knew themselves.

Mr. Mawll.

CHAPTER XL.

SUFFERING.

"PHILIP," said Heritage, when Mawll had gone, "that man is as great a scoundrel as it is possible to conceive of, yet I'm glad I have seen him, and what is more, I intend to make use of his rascality."

This was rather a shock to Philip, who had returned from his mission in a distinctly heroic frame of mind, born of youth and gentleness. He was depressed by a feeling of profound distress at the helpless condition of the people he had been among, who, in the name of "liberty," were driven like slaves by their own fellows, and in the name of "sacred rights" were bidden to starve, and to see their children die of hunger, for a something called "a principle." And now he had come home to luxury and to rest, to find his stepfather, whom he honoured, and whose teaching had inspired him with a capacity to feel for others' wrongs, trafficking with rogues. His distress was apparent though he said nothing, and Heritage was pleased. He took him kindly by the shoulder, and smiling, said:

"It's a case of big fishes feeding on little fishes, and that man is going to bait a hook to catch a whale. And what is more, I really think he'll catch him."

Heritage's spirits had revived.

"Now, tell me what you have seen down yonder," he said.

"I have seen enough," said Philip, "to make me doubt whether there is a God in Heaven, or any justice possible upon the earth. I have seen hundreds and thousands of serfs humbled before the most tyrannous of masters, their fellow-workmen, deprived of free will, and coerced by the most irresistible of all taskmasters, an artificial conscience manufactured by their social surroundings and the fear of what their neighbours would think of them. They are at this moment submitting to hunger and privation of all sorts, and will even leave their houses rather than disobey their self-constituted leaders, whom they fancy they select. One man whom I got to confide in me said the alternative of submis-

sion was too dreadful to contemplate, and he added, with a solemnity that would have been laughable if it had not been shocking: 'Why, sir, if I was to die having left the Union they wouldn't attend my funeral.'"

"And what is your remedy?" asked Heritage.

"I know of none. Bowdler is a masterful man, and they follow him. He talks the high-sounding platitudes of his class, and they applaud him. A phrase or two of his that is as false as a palpable untruth catches the fuglemen; they cheer it, and it is accepted by the mass. Promises are made that are impossible of fulfilment, and believed in because it would take hours to exhibit the fallacy that underlies them to the intelligence of those whom they delude. So the people suffer in their homes, and their leaders flourish and are flattered. Surely there should be some way of preventing such a wrong!"

"You have no remedy, you say," answered Heritage, "nor has anyone else. The human difficulty can never be overcome by any cut and dried system. It has to right itself by suffering. Sometimes the suffering is taken in experience, and sometimes in anxious inquiry after truth. It seldom comes by inspiration, and never by extraneous legislation. Before the people effectually resist these false prophets they must learn by practical experience the working of economic laws, and they will do this by suffering from the breach of them. You do not appear," added Heritage, in a changed tone, "to have heard of your friend Delfoy in your moving about among the men."

"He has not been there," said Philip indifferently, "but he has been mentioned as a sympathiser."

"He has?" said Heritage excitedly. "Tell me what was said—precisely, if you can."

"Nothing material. He has been mentioned as a sympathiser, and as a subscriber to the strike fund, and a passage from one of his recent speeches was quoted by Bowdler, but that is all, I think, we have heard of him."

"Quite enough," said Heritage. "You talk of the doing of wrong and the preventing of suffering. Now, suppose all this suffering has been brought about by Delfoy and Bowdler to influence the markets, what would you say to that?"

"That it was fiendish work, and that such men should be sent to the hulks; but how can you tell that it is so?"

"I cannot tell, but I believe it is so. No one can tell, and yet we may believe it to be so. We cannot prove it by legal rule, but we can be assured of it in fact, and that effusive old

gentleman who left us as you came in will in a day or two give us some facts that will lead us to perfectly sound conclusions. I shall then act in my own way, and prescribe my own punishment for the ringleader. You will help me in this, Philip?" said Heritage in his winning way.

"Most certainly," was the answer. "I shall be delighted if I can see a means of checking these men. It relieves me immensely to discover that you are sanguine of success; and I do hope that I shall some day acquire your experience."

Heritage shook his head as he answered:

"I trust your experience will be less bitter than mine has been, Philip. I may have contributed to my sombreness of spirit by brooding too much upon the distresses of life, and taking too much to heart one's errors of judgment and the consequences of one's follies, but I cannot claim to have had a successful career or an agreeable experience of life, except in the one incident of my happiness with your mother and your mother's children."

He smiled as he made the last remark, and Philip, with an effort, said:

"If gratitude can add to your pleasure you should be rich in gladness, but I should like to see my way to repay your generosity by assisting in this Bowdler matter."

Heritage was grave for awhile, and seemed in doubt. Then, turning to Philip, he said:

"I'm afraid you cannot. I'm sorry, but I have a special reason for asking you to avoid all connection with the business, and I may not tell you what that reason is. There is, however, another matter that I am bound to speak of—deeply concerning you, and that must not be left to accident."

He stopped and looked about him as he walked, and then approaching Philip, said in faltering tones:

"You have a trial before you, Philip, imposed by honour and truth, and you may not shirk it. I have a trial before me, for I have a communication to make to you that it would be criminal in me to delay, and which must give you pain. Both of us may have to suffer from causes that are none of our seeking or making, but which we find actively at work in our path, and which we dare not conceal lest they become hydra-headed scourges for ourselves and others in the future. Can you bear a trial, Philip?"

"I must," he answered, "if it is imposed by you, and you say that it is mine to bear."

"That is right, my dear boy. I have recently been thinking that you may to-day, to-morrow, at some time in the future think of marrying—I speak generally. When that time comes it will become necessary for you to state to those who may, in such a case, have a right to know that there was some irregularity in your mother's first marriage that makes you in law fatherless. I again put the case generally. What the facts are I do not know in detail, and no one knows, unless it be some who will not speak for your benefit. Your mother must not be asked; and I think it better you should not inquire of anyone. It is enough for us that I am your father now; and I had designed that the truth should never have been revealed to you, even to this limited extent. Circumstances have, however, come to my knowledge recently which make it clear to me that you are in danger at some future time of having this fact thrust upon you when you may have allied yourself with another, and in circumstances which may reflect upon your truth and honour."

There was a pause. Looking at Philip's horror-struck countenance, Heritage went on:

"Do not be over-anxious. It will be a small matter for you if taken boldly in hand now; but think how grave it would be if at some time in the future ignorance were construed as concealment and you were upbraided as a cheat. Why, such an incident would be terrible. The turn of a word would destroy confidence, where complete reliance was a necessary condition of happiness, and even of endurance. Think, in such a case as I have contemplated, what justice and honour command, what duty may compel."

Philip, who still remained silent, moved towards a chair, and sat with his arms folded on his breast, lost in thought, with a bitter curl upon his lip and an angry look in his eye. Heritage marked the attitude and demeanour, and it arrested him in his walk. Presently he said:

"I have not told you this, Philip, to pain you; I have done so to prevent you experiencing a remorse that might to a sensitive nature prove unendurable. You are saying, perhaps, 'Why was I told this?' and you may upbraid me for having done so."

"No!" exclaimed Philip. "No, no! Nothing but kindness has ever been experienced by me from you. I blame no one but my fate! Why was I born? Why do I live? To what end can these things tend? For what purpose can such things be?"

He relapsed into his former attitude of angered endurance, and Heritage, taking up his last few words, said quietly:

"These questions you ask, Philip, I cannot answer. Perhaps it is wiser not to attempt to construe the purpose of our being and the incidents of our waking hours. The problem is too vast for human capacity. We come from illimitable space enshrouded in impenetrable darkness. We emerge upon the margin of a little crescent of light that we call 'life,' and having walked within it for a while, we pass out of it into the impenetrable darkness and illimitable space beyond. How can we, from what we see within the margin of this little crescent of light, construe the greater mysteries of creation? The inscrutable lies before us; and, looking back, although some see more clearly than others, very few can be sure that they see aright, and none can trust themselves to interpret with certainty the full purpose and effect of what they chance to see. We are finite, Philip, and only those who are inflated with the presumption of ignorance dare to dogmatise on the theory of the Universe and the purposes of the Creator. Come, Philip," added Heritage, putting his hand upon his shoulder as he sat, "you forgive me for telling you the truth? When the necessity arises, perhaps I may help you to remove the difficulty, such as it is; but, whatever we do, we must have no concealment in such matters."

CHAPTER XLI.

NO SURRENDER.

PHILIP received a dainty note of the newest fashion, folded lengthwise. It was pink in colour, and tinted with a device so as to resemble watered silk. The family crest was in the left-hand corner in gold, and a golden address was on the right. The whimsical girl wrote, in lines beginning at the left-hand top corner, and ending at the bottom right-hand corner, thus :—

' DEAREST STRANGER, come to tea.
The mother's at home,
The uncle's gone to Aix, and I
Am your very obedient servant,
Your own ALICE.
COME!!!!"

A very unladylike letter—a reckless, butterfly letter—the letter of a mistress of a pocket borough of her own making, and the seat vacant—a captivating letter—a letter that fired Philip with a daring hope and crushed him with despair, for he was charged to declare himself of doubtful origin, with a bar sinister on an unknown coat-of-arms, beneath a name unknown, and borne upon a breast that could not brook dishonour.

She was waiting for him, arrayed in gossamer robes of blue, and the flossy silken hair was bound with a ribbon of blue, and yet was all dishevelled in sprays and in bands that went hither and thither and glistened whenever light was near, however meagerly it shone; and he looked on the pure white skin, and the tinted cheek, and the laughing eye, and the hands that wore only one little ring upon them, and that was his.

This was what he saw, and this was what he came to meet,

and tell that life was a sad, sad trial at the best, and to him a cause of mourning and distress, and that life to them, as they had hoped and imagined it to be, was merely a mirage; that the real life, the life that had to be lived and borne and suffered, was a broken toy, a roofless ruin, a mastless vessel stranded on the shore.

All this and more he came to tell, and what did he say?

Not a word, because Lady Alice spoke first, and generally took him in charge. She burst upon him, invaded his mind, and carried him off to entirely new subjects of absorbing interest and immediate concern, based upon his expedition among the labour malcontents. What could poor Philip do, with a weight upon his soul, all his heroics dissipated, and this most delightful butterfly of a human being pressing him into her service willy-nilly, with the vigour of an old-time midshipman leading a pressgang?

"I've been reading your speeches," she said, "and have pasted them all in a book. Here it is," she added, opening a large quarto. "Only one newspaper column on a page, to give room for my annotations, which are numerous and exacting as regards your future operations, but—imperative."

She said this with a stern countenance and a whimsical glitter in her eye, but Phillip could only smile sadly and nurse a faint hope.

"Now it depends upon you, Philip, when Mr. Foolcher—my present member—will apply for the Chiltern Hundreds and go; and it depends upon you because it depends upon me and because I depend upon you, and because we're all depending upon one another. That's a paraphrase of one of your speeches, Mr. Political Economist, but I must say I consider that was a very good idea of yours about none of us being independent. I've marked it 'very good' in my annotations. But for all that it is so very good you mustn't say it when down with my people, because the clergyman tells me that they are all very much impressed with the belief that they are extremely dependent on me, and I think they had better remain under that impression."

Philip bowed, and as they were alone he kissed her. He couldn't help it. Despite his heavy heart and his desperate resolution, gratified vanity and love together made the way for him, and floated him like a feather on the wind into the arms of the Lady Alice.

"Well, that's settled," said his mistress, "you've sealed the

compact beforehand. That shows confidence; and now I'll tell you all about it. We'll sit down first."

They sat in a bay window looking out on the park, and the tea was placed round the corner on a dainty whirligig service for three, for form's sake; but there were only two, as the Countess had had a tiff with her daughter over this election business, and had assumed a headache to avoid being present.

To some mothers it is a source of special annoyance that their daughters grow up, but when, added to this work of time, circumstances make them practically mistress of their own actions the grievance is beyond endurance, and necessarily results in headaches and a disregard of consequences. It is quite true that no matter what the years of a daughter, and however independent in estate she may be, she is always subject to influences that her mother may legitimately exercise; but as these influences take their rise in an invariable respect and devotion on the one part, and the natural growth of tender solicitude on the other, it is obvious they must be left out of consideration in this case.

"You must understand, Philip," said the Lady Alice, "that I've been doing Mr. Foolcher's subscriptions for him for some time past; and my bargain with him was that he should sit as long as he could manage it, and that he should not retire without letting me know before he told anyone else, so that he might arrange the day with me when he was to retire. Now, what do you think?" she asked, starting back with bewitching roguery and motioning him afar off, as if to see the effect of her questioning; then with a rush she exclaimed: "Mr. Foolcher wants to retire, and nobody knows it but me—and you. So you'll have to write your address and make your arrangements, and then we will give Mr. Foolcher his marching orders."

She leapt from her chair, clapped her hands, made an attempt at a pirouette, and returned the kiss, blown off the tips of her fingers at a distance.

But there sat Philip, as sad as any conventional prototype of classic grief, wholly unable to respond in appropriate terms to the offer of this glorious opportunity. His silence was so incomprehensible that the Lady Alice stopped to consider the position, and leaning towards him, as she stood with a cup of tea in her hand, half-way to her lips, she said:

"Well, and isn't the prospect pleasing?"

Then came the outburst—a perfect maelstrom of regret and denunciation of fate, all beyond the comprehension of the

Lady Alice, who listened in amazement, in pain, in gentle concern for one whose case was hers, she liked to think, and in whose hopes her own were centered, because he was the first she had ever met whose spirit and ambitions were ingenuous and free from sordid ends.

"Oh, Alice," he cried, "I am most miserable! Your goodness and kindness break in upon me with all the strength of your beauty—for you are beautiful, Alice, and I make no empty compliment. This is no time for compliment. I do not know, I cannot tell whether I should accept your offer in this matter. There is no reason why I should not—"

"Then accept it," she interposed, flinging her arms wide open with the intensity of her demand.

"And yet," he continued unheeding, "if I accept I shall by that acceptance imply continued acquiescence in the other greater matter concerning which we have agreed in ignorance; and oh, my heart, my love, my hope of future happiness, and life of love, I cannot tell my misery to you."

"But what's the matter, what have you done?" she exclaimed, with her hands brought forward, and with marks of pain upon her brow.

This wholly unexpected and incomprehensible barrier to the continuation of her work annoyed her. She was an eminently practical young woman, with a strong will of her own, artfully. concealed within a form of gossamer and by a manner of studied frivolity. Philip's attitude seemed likely to remove the light surroundings of this strong will and practical common sense, and exhibit these characteristics in all their vigour. He shook his head and said in trembling tones:

"I cannot tell. You must ask my father."

"Ask your father?" she exclaimed in falsetto. "Why, I never promised to marry him! Philip, you're a goose."

There was no time for a reply. A footman entered and announced the arrival of Mr. Foolcher, a short, stout old gentleman, with a red face, a bushy beard of iron-grey hair, a choleric temperament, and a martyr to gout. He said he dared not sit down, because when he did it took two men to get him on his legs again, and that his language during the process was not fit for the ears of ladies. He continued walking about the room with a stick, and apologised for keeping on the move, but said he really could not help it. He was ordered to do a certain amount of exercise every day, indoors or out, and he preferred to do it all at once, because the

moment he stopped he had to swear to keep the pain down. "And that's the new member, eh?" he continued, on being introduced to Philip. "Lucky dog. Quite young, good-looking, fine prospect—damme, sir, you ought to be proud of the chance," he shouted, with an angry look at Philip, followed by an extra twinge in the right leg and a sudden collapse of his resentment.

"Ah, well, I only wish I'd got his prospects," he said apologetically to the Lady Alice, as he marched by her towards the other end of the room. "But what can a man do? What's the use of having a seat in the House if you cannot sit down on it with comfort? Why, it's an absurd proposition; I say, sir, it's absurd," he said, shaking his stick at Philip, as if he had contradicted him.

Philip bowed.

"What a prospect!" he went on, getting angry again. "Youth, health, money, estates, no troubles, no gout, every opportunity for distinguishing himself, wise counsellors, and—and—" The old gentleman pulled himself up in front of them, and looked from one to the other with glistening eyes and smiling lips that failed to express the thought that wrestled in his brain, and finally gave vent to a long drawn out "Ah! I shouldn't wonder," and went off at a trot.

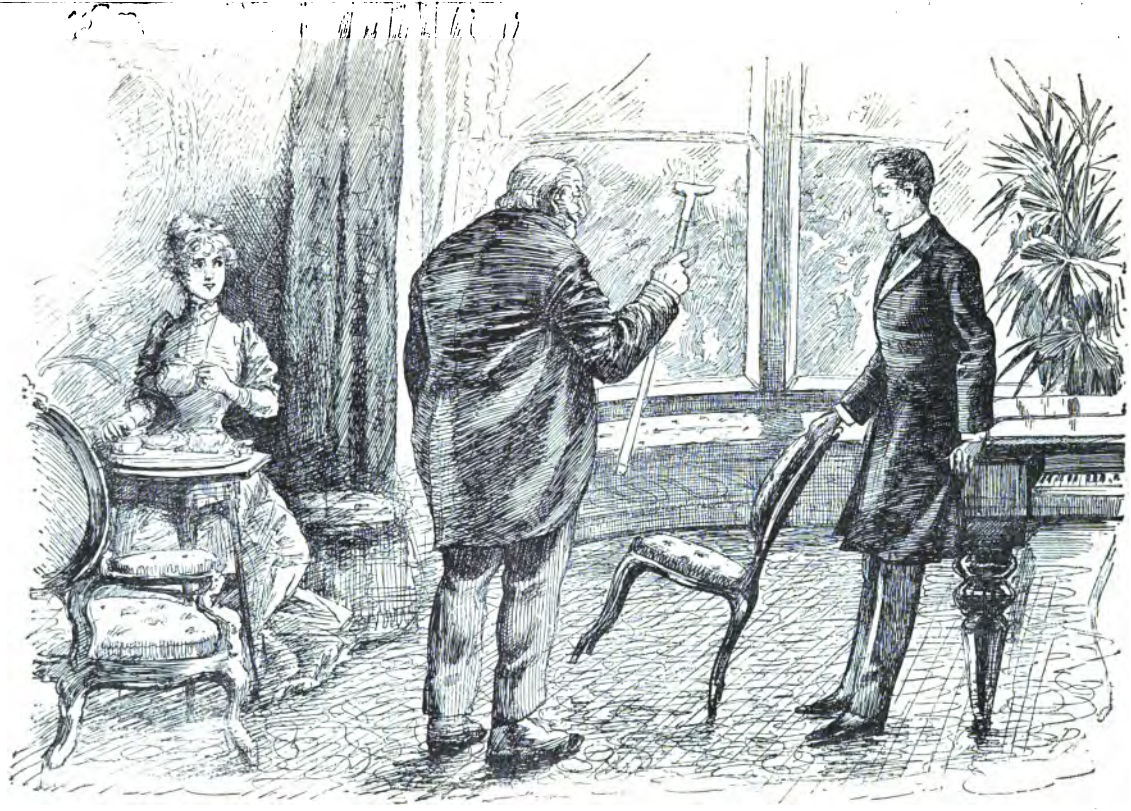
Presently he returned, and as he came along he said:

"Well, my dear, let's to business. I always call her 'my dear,' sir, always have since she was in long clothes—oh Lord! I wish I was in long clothes now. When shall I apply for the Hundreds, eh? That's our business. We've got to name the day. Ha, ah! lucky dog!" and he tramped along shaking his head and chuckling at his humour.

"Well, Mr. Foolcher," said Lady Alice from behind the tea-table, and blushing just a little. "I'm sure I'm much obliged to you for coming, and we mustn't keep you; but Mr. Heritage will call on you and let you know, or if you cannot see him, will write to you."

"Very good, my dear; quite right, quite right. I must be off. Please to ring, sir, for my man to get me downstairs. Horrible business going downstairs, jars everything—nerves, bones, muscles, everything. Good-bye, sir, wish you success; good-bye, my dear, God bless you. Let me know the day. They're all at me—a parcel of vultures—but I'll tell none of them. Trust Mark Foolcher for keeping to a bargain."

And away he tramped (led by his man, who met him at



Pocket Borough Proposals

the drawing-room door), grumbling and swearing by turns, down the stairs, and out of the house, and out of life—a rare old dog that had had his day and growled only because he couldn't have another.

"Now," said the Lady Alice when Mr. Foolcher had gone, "now you see the election is in your hands, and you will have to go on; and now, tell me what's the matter, for upon my word you're a riddle as you stand."

She folded her arms as she spoke, and looked at him with her head on one side, in the manner of one appraising him.

"Yes," answered Philip, "I will try. I will endeavour to speak quietly and briefly, and you must consider the matter coldly and dispassionately."

She nodded, and the creases came in her brow, for she began to feel annoyed at what she conceived to be an unreasonable interception on his part.

"In the first place," he began, "the name of Heritage is not mine by right."

"Yes, we know that," she commented. "You have assumed it, as people often do assume names, on taking property. That's nothing. But I like the name, and that's a good deal," she added, with a toss of the head.

"In the second place," said Philip, looking down, "I heard only yesterday, for the first time, from my stepfather that my real name is unknown to him; that the name he first knew us by is not our name; that, in fact, I have no name; that my parentage is obscure, and that it may be even disgraceful."

Her face blanched, and a premonition of giddiness came upon her. He looked askance at her, timidly at first, and then, as he marked the effects of the shock his communication had made upon her, he regained the courage of obligation, and with a countenance pitiable to behold he said:

"You see, Alice, how impossible it is even to contemplate your association with one whose origin is discredited, and whose real name may be the very mark of dishonour."

"Why did you tell me of this?" she asked, with her eyes cast down.

Her wilfulness provided her with only one thought on the matter: the communication was an intrusion.

"How could I refrain?" asked Philip. "Concealment was impossible in such a case."

"Well," she cried, with a petulant shake of the head and

a wry face, "it's very annoying." Then she took a turn in the room as Mr. Foolcher had done, eyed Philip furtively, and said, holding her hands behind her back as if she had been a statesman instructing an ambassador: "I don't see that you look very different from what you did when I last saw you. Do you feel different?"

Philip shook his head and said:

"I don't know, Alice, whether you comprehend fully what I have said, but you do not seem to."

"Oh, yes, I do," she answered, "and I want to hear no more. It's disagreeable, but it must be put up with. We cannot have all our furniture covered with velvet," she continued in dismal tones, and then with some asperity asked: "Who knows of this?"

"No one but my stepfather, so far as I know, and perhaps my mother."

"Philip," said the Lady Alice solemnly, after much reflection, "you *are* a goose." She looked at him, leaning forward with the air of a dictatorial governess. "Does your stepfather throw you over?"

"No."

"Is there going to be any difference at your home?"

"None."

"Then why should there be any difference with me? I'm not proposing to marry a name. If I had troubled about names I should have accepted Lord Fowley, but then I should have had to be a peeress in course of time—a dreadful responsibility! Philip," she added, "if you have no other reason than this for disturbing our arrangements we will dismiss the subject and begin your address to the electors."

Philip shook his head, a doleful, weak, miserable shake of the head—a sort of protest without the backbone in it.

"Now, do you know, Philip," said the persistent young lady, "I have acquired quite a new interest in you. I regard you in quite a new light. I think I shall end by getting desperately fond of you."

"Indeed," said Philip; "a new light, you say?"

"Yes, quite a new light. You see, Philip, I have up to this been only interested and pleased at your entering into my plans. Now I am anxious about you personally. It must be this difficulty you have started that has done this; but really you are *quite* interesting."

She gazed at him at a little distance, with her eyebrows

raised, as if he had been a new and rare curio sent in for approval.

"You mustn't joke of this, Alice. It is very serious. The most serious thing that can ever happen to us in all our lives is happening now, and I cannot consent to regard it in any other light."

"Precisely. It makes an immense difference. Up to the present hour I have been merely complacent and assenting. Now I am forced to become importunate; and you, in the new relations, must be as responsive as I was in the old. Now go home and consult your father about the address, and about the time, and call to-morrow morning with everything ready."

But Philip did not go. He remained to reap the reward of his inconstancy to grave resolutions of self-denial. Why, if he had relinquished the grand ambition of sacrificing his passion on the altar of duty, should he not bask in the smile of the siren who had won him back to fealty? And why, if a goddess refused his sacrifice and threw down his altar, should he not worship the goddess in the way she wished?

He was only human.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE AUTOCRAT OF LABOUR.

Not the least curious among current fallacies is that which assigns to the different classes of the community a different kind of human nature. As virtue and industry are held to be the characteristics of the very poor, so vice and idleness are presumed to be the marks of the very wealthy, and while to be an employer is to develop a thirst for man's blood, so to labour for wages is to cultivate a meek and enduring spirit. Following upon these general conceptions of the state of society, it was deduced by Mr. Bowdler, M.P., and commonly accepted as a truth by his hearers, that such and such a man must be good because he received wages, and that such another must be bad because he paid them. The extraordinary fact that some very poor men who received wages had become very rich men and paid them, and had associated with the paying of wages a rapacious and grinding disposition, was regarded as a proof of the essential difference in the natures of the very wealthy and the very poor; and it had been asserted by the followers of Bowdler that such men could not help becoming rich because they were essentially brutal, and that if they had not been brutal they could not possibly have become rich.

How it came to pass from these premises that Mr. Bowdler had left his comfortable chambers in Westminster to spend exhausting days and nights in the northern counties, denouncing, exhorting, and appealing as only Bowdler could, to the end that those whom he addressed should take steps to secure more of this corroding gold than they possessed, was a mystery to the logician, and was to be accounted for only upon the presumption that he hoped to decrease the evil by diluting it. His hearers were controlled by a commoner influence; they were quite prepared to accept the consequences if they had the gold, and firmly believed Bowdler could get it for them.

Bowdler was a grand man for agitation. His language was enriched with the choicest expletives and the most un-

qualified denunciation of everything and everybody that displeased him. Nothing to him was sacred but the object immediately present to him; and nothing was true but his own dogmas. He revelled in course ribaldry and contemptuous sneers at all those who wore gloves—which he did himself at times—or rode in carriages—which he also did himself as opportunity offered. He denounced all capitalists as tyrants and destroyers, without mentioning that he had himself several large investments in industrial companies; and in the matter of tyranny no autocrat who ever sat upon a throne was more exacting of blind obedience, and none more resolutely pursued and tortured revolting followers, save only that he did not extend to them the relief of death. Of pity for the suffering women and children he had none. With Draconian severity he put "the cause" above every obligation, human and divine; and in his pursuit of an imaginary freedom he reduced every man within the scope of his organisation to abject slavery.

Still he had been successful, and the country was in flames. He was in a thoroughly gleeful state of mind as he read the London papers one day at lunch, recording somewhat exaggerated reports of the privations of the workpeople and their families.

"That'll fetch 'em," said he to himself, shaking his head. "That'll put the screw on the employers." And he mentally resolved, as he drank a glass of champagne, to draw a few harrowing pictures of this same suffering in his next speech, and denounce the masters as the cause of it. He was ruminating over the point in full view of a very choice leg of mutton, when a card was brought to him bearing the name of "Mawll."

"A gentleman, you say?" he asked of the waiter.

"Yes, sir, an old gentleman. May be a clergyman, sir."

"Ah, dear me," ruminated the agitator. "'Mawll.' Don't know him, John. And he doesn't state his business?"

"No sir; says it's quite private."

"Ah," said Bowdler, "he won't state his business, and he's a gentleman. Now, John, why should I see a gentleman? I ask you, John, why *should* I see a gentleman?"

John, who was a diplomatist, in the sense that he always agreed with the occupants of private rooms on all subjects whatever, even if he vowed adhesion to half-a-dozen contrary opinions in one day, said he didn't see that Mr. Bowdler should put himself out for a gentleman.

"No, John, you're right. I'm for the industrial classes. I'm not for gentlemen. If this person cannot state his business I cannot see this person, John; and if I don't like the looks of his business when he does state it I will not see him neither. Ask him his business, John, and take his card with you, John."

Having thus vindicated the dignity of the profession of agitator, and the superiority of manual labour over all other occupations, Mr. Bowdler cut himself another slice of mutton and poured out another glass of champagne.

John returned with a slip of paper on which was written the words: "An important communication of a private nature from a fellow-labourer."

Bowdler read the paper with every show of deep thought, and then suddenly exclaimed:

"Good! John, show Mr. Mawll up."

Mr. Mawll entered, with his hat in his hand, and with his humblest missionary spirit strongly expressed in the slight stoop and the half-closed eyes. He assured Mr. Bowdler that only the urgency and importance of the communication he had to make would have induced him to intrude upon Mr. Bowdler's privacy.

"Take a seat, sir," said the important personage addressed. "I'm pressed for time, and you'll excuse me going on with my lunch."

Bowdler had an impression that his visitor was hungry. He thought of the starving workpeople as he looked at him, and imagined how the hunger would grow in acuteness as he saw another eat.

"State your business," he said. "I'm listening," and he filled his mouth.

"Well, Bowdler," said the visitor, "as the waiter's gone, I'm Newmans."

"What!" exclaimed Bowdler, dropping his knife and fork, "Newmans! 'Pon my life, so it is. Here, have some lunch."

With this he rose and rang the bell, ordered Mr. Mawll to be served, and both maintained an absolute silence during the time the waiter was in the room.

John regarded this as strange and unconstitutional from a waiter's point of view. He cast a sidelong glance at Bowdler and found him waiting with the carving knife in hand for the plate John was to proffer, and he remarked an amused and contented expression on his countenance. The visitor, he

noticed, kept his eyes on the tablecloth, during the process of serving, with an appearance of humility which led John to the conclusion that he was not a clergyman, and certainly not a gentleman, which also he thought accounted for Mr. Bowdler's affability.

"John," said Bowdler, as he observed the waiter had lifted a knife, a fork, and a spoon in succession, and put them down again objectlessly and nervously, as indicating that he was ready to leave the room, "decant a bottle of the port—my particular, John."

Obviously the visitor was not a gentleman, thought John—perhaps a delegate, and no doubt an influential one. John left the room with the knowledge that he must be careful about the decanting, and have a good show of beeswing or there would be trouble. It was within John's experience that delegates were particular.

"Now, upon my soul," exclaimed Bowdler, when they were alone, "you astonish me, turning up here in this out-of-the-way place, and in that fig too. Upon my soul, I didn't know you."

"No," said Newmans laconically, "I didn't expect you to."

"It wasn't difficult to find me, eh?" said Bowdler, with a knowing shake of the head. "I suppose I'm a good deal in people's mouths just now, eh? Easier to find me than to find you, eh? Ha, ha! How's the world using you?"

"Very well," said Newmans, "very well indeed, and if you study your own interests in what I am come about it will use me better."

Newmans said this with a snap and a keen glance at Bowdler, and then went on with the mutton.

"Why, what have I got to do with you, *now?*" asked Bowdler, with some concern.

"Nothing," said Newmans, "I have come about your business, not mine. I've come all the way straight to you from over yonder—about your business *here*," and he rapped the table with his knife handle and regarded his friend earnestly.

"Oh," said Bowdler, with concern, "you surprise me."

"I meant to," was the rejoinder, and the conversation stopped with the entrance of John, bearing the port.

"Cheese and celery, John—Cheshire, mind; none of your foreign products for me," saying which Bowdler took up the decanter of port and held it up to the light as he ex-

claimed: "See it. Look at it. I've never seen nothing like it. Look at it floating about. Lord, it might have been cut off a dragon fly. Special tap, John, ain't it?" said Bowdler, appealing to John.

"Yessir; it's been in the cellar here for forty year—laid in by the old landlord for the ironmasters' meetings; and nobody cares for it now exceptin' one or two gentlemen like yourself."

"Ah," said Bowdler, "it's wonderful the ignorance of people. Why, if the aristocracy, as they call theirselves, were worth a red cent some of 'em would have been down here with a French cook on purpose to drink it out. Why, there's nothing like it in the kingdom. No, Mawll, nothing. A pure accident but there's nothing like it."

Saying which he tasted it, and Newmans tasted it, and they agreed that it was wonderful. When John had withdrawn the serious colloquy began.

"Now, Newmans," said Bowdler, "out with it—straight."

"To be sure," said Newmans, and then in a low tone he added: "Your movements have attracted great interest over yonder—and I have come with a proposition."

"Indeed," said Bowdler, more complimented by the statement that his movements were observed on the Continent than by any adulation, however extravagant, exhaled from British soil. "Now, how's that?"

"There's been a bear syndicate working over yonder," said Newmans, always associating the phrase "over yonder" with a backward jerk of the head, "and you'll break the bear syndicate if you go on."

Bowdler assumed his most distinguished Parliamentary air, sitting back in his chair, with his left thumb in the armhole of his waistcoat, with his right hand fingering the stem of his wine glass, and with compressed lips and a thoroughly self-confident demeanour. He nodded three or four times, as indicating his high appreciation of the compliment paid him by the people "over yonder" watching his movements and commissioning an emissary to treat with him — thereby generally asserting that Bowdler was a power, and now that a foreign ambassador had been sent to him—albeit his old friend Newmans, *alias* Mawll—quite a potentate.

"Your friends are right," said he at length, leaning forward, with his arm upon the table. "Your friends had better close the account at once."

Bowdler and The Beeswing.

"Well, no," said Newmans quietly. "They hold it open till I have completed my commission."

"And what is your commission?"

"To close the strike."

"What?" cried Bowdler in a modulated shriek. "Howling demons, Newmans, what are you talking about?"

"Nothing very extraordinary," said Newmans, placing both his hands on the table and looking at them as he pressed the tablecloth. He seemed to be pressing the excitement out of his friend. When he appeared to have got it all out, to his satisfaction, he said quietly: "There's more money in stopping the strike than going on with it."

"What!" gasped Bowdler, amazed at the novelty and daring of the declaration.

"There's money over yonder," said Newmans, with the usual jerk. "If you go on, they stand to lose. If you stop, they win to a certainty. They are prepared to pay to win. I mentioned no names, but I said I thought I could manage to get the strike stopped, and here I am. And Bowdler," he added impressively, "now's your chance—the chance of a lifetime. You know me, Bowdler, and I say it's the chance of a lifetime."

"God, Newmans," said Bowdler in a hoarse whisper; "if it was anybody but you I'd run away rather than talk of sich a thing."

Then he rose up, put his hands in his trousers pockets, and walked the room in his excitement. His eyes glistened, his lips worked, and his large eyebrows seemed to twitch as the weighty considerations involved were passed in review. Presently he stopped in front of his friend, and said with a grin:

"Newmans, my buck, you're a marvel. How do you put it?"

"First, how much do you stand to make by going on?" asked Newmans. Then, finding Bowdler hesitated, he added: "You needn't be squeamish with me. Tell me straight, and we'll measure the considerations. If I cannot make it worth your while to do what I want, I'll go back at once, and leave you to win on your own hand."

Bowdler walked the room again, and Newmans, still sitting at the table, as he had sat throughout, watched him keenly, with perfect composure, giving the ideas time to work and saturate the brain. Newmans was never in a hurry to get

a man to his way of thinking. He would say to himself: "It has taken me a week to think that out and frame the scheme. Surely I must give a man five minutes to comprehend it and approve it." He did so on this occasion, watching the ideas grow.

Bowdler continued to walk, and his face continued to work. Then he went to the door, opened it, closed it, and returning to his seat, leaned over to his friend, and whispered:

"Over five thou."

"And my friends over yonder will give you four times that to stop in a week," said Newmans, scarcely moving his lips, but with his eyes intently fixed on his friend.

"Twenty?" asked Bowdler.

Newmans nodded.

"All clear for me?"

Another nod.

"No com. to you?"

Newmans shook his head.

"Nor to anybody?"

Another shake.

"Well, that'll have to be a deal," said Bowdler, "if it can be done proper," and he rose up for another walk. Presently he turned on his friend, and said: "Look here, Newmans, you was always a dab at scheming, and I suppose you've got it all in your square old noddle, cut and dried as you used to. Now, how's it to be done safe and proper? I mustn't be sold, you know."

"No," said Newmans. "I'll get you as good as money down to-morrow in London if you agree."

"But I've a meeting to-morrow—a tremendous mass meeting."

"If we start to-night, and you don't find things to your liking when you get to town, you can be back for your meeting to-morrow night. If things are satisfactory you'll be taken ill in London. Broken leg—accident, catching the train."

"Ah!" said Bowdler, who commenced another walk, and then taking his seat, and sidling up to his visitor, he said in confidential tones, "You know, my friend, there's something very inviting about this proposal of yourn. Between you and me there's a deal of ingratitude about these working men. They don't seem to care about the men that work for them. They'll cheer, you know. Oh, yes, they'll cheer, and you may starve in the gutter the next day if they don't want to use you

for their own ends. Now, you know this twenty thou. you talk of will make all the difference between bare subsistence and competence to me. If we pull this off," he went on with growing excitement, and yet with bated breath, "why, I shall be quite independent of them, and be able to deal with public questions with a free hand. I shall be able to cut the painter and leave them, with their low mean ways, to grovel in the dirt. There's worse men than me been in the Government afore to-day," he added, with a shake of the head and a sour look.

Bowdler was expressing in this outburst of confidence no uncommon experience. It is given to few, indeed, to bear an undeviating record for consistency in morals, in business, or in politics. To the majority of men the course that seems honourable and just to-day is often felt by the same minds to be an act of folly or imprudence on the morrow. What to-day may be pressed upon a fellow-man, as due to him for benefits conferred, and yet leave the debt unpaid, would in the near future be withheld as a preposterous acknowledgment of services forgotten or despised. What was singular in Bowdler's reflection was the apparent ignorance of the fact that the selfish forgetfulness of which he complained was not peculiar to the mechanics and labourers with whom he was associated. The infirmity is common to all classes, and it was Bowdler's own vanity that magnified the ingratitude in his case, if, indeed, it could be said that his followers were ungrateful, when they were only ignorant of his epicurean tastes and his passion for beeswing.

"And now look here," he continued, as if he had suddenly applied his remarks to himself, "where do you come in?"

Newmans worked his mouth round as if he were extracting a smile from among his molar teeth, and then said:

"After you."

"The worst of it is," said Bowdler, hardly noticing the remark, and reverting to his relations with his followers, "I'm always obliged to keep such a friendly face towards these fellows I work for; and I'm always obliged to pretend things are so beautiful among 'em, that they've such sweet tempers, and that they lead such lovely lives, and all the rest of the cant, it makes me sick. By the way, Newmans, I shall have to make it all right with some of the delegates, you know. How's that to be done?"

"After you," repeated Newmans, absolutely smiling on

this occasion. Newmans was so delighted to see his ideas sprout and grow and bear fruit that he almost laughed.

"Well," said Bowdler, again walking in his excitement, "you've never sold me yet, but, upon my life, it's an awful risk you're asking me to run."

"You may be quite easy," said Newmans. "There'll be enough to satisfy everybody, me included, and it will all pass through your hands. Now for the next train to London!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

A ROUND OF THE CLOCK.

HITHERTO the incidents recorded in these pages have followed each other in natural sequence and in chronological order. They have been evolved the one from the other as the sparks fly upward, as the quickened seed bursts and grows, as the sickle follows the plough. Now we come, in a single round of the clock, upon six occurrences almost simultaneous in point of time, and four of them happening within an area coverable by a fifteen minutes' walk in the western portion of the city. The other two happened in the country, many miles apart, but each at the same hour of the day. As nearly as the six incidents can be placed, they fall in the order in which they are here set down; and although of special interest to those engaged in them, they were in some respects of more importance to others as yet in ignorance of their coming to pass.

Bray on the Mysteries.

It had become the custom of Mr. Marmaduke Bray to call upon Mrs. Delfoy at unusual hours—at eleven in the morning, at two in the afternoon, on the eve of lunch, with the intention of joining in it, at any time when it would be probable he could have an opportunity of dazzling his hostess with his magniloquent conversation. He coined phrases laboriously and let them off as impromptu. He consulted dictionaries of quotations from the poets, and artfully led up to the subject of which they treated, and startled his hearer with a burst of second-hand eloquence. He concocted vague approaches to epigram that startled even the intelligent by their daring, and made sober men think, because they meant nothing.

He was a curious man. He made one wonder whether he really believed himself capable, or whether he knew he was a charlatan and gloried in the deception he practised on the unwary. Some who had studied him well inclined to the latter alternative, because of the choice he made of hearers,

and yet his successes were so obvious that he would have been almost justified in self-deception.

He had taken lunch with Mrs. Delfoy and had begun his customary didactic monologue in the drawing-room. He had described some great reception he had been present at, and had deplored the indifference of Delfoy to any such means of acquiring popularity. From this he commented upon Delfoy's continued absence from his "domestic hearth," and sympathising with his hostess in the consequences of that defect in character, recommended her to have assemblies of her own, and offered to assist in realising so commendable an ambition.

"That would be nice," she simpered. "Perhaps Geoffrey would come if I had nice people. You are very good, Mr. Bray, and very kind. I *do* feel lonely."

"Delfoy is not a *wise* man," said Bray, on the march. "He is brilliant, he has genius, but he is not *wise*."

"But, then, you're so clever," languished Mrs. Delfoy, "and so domesticated. Geoffrey never was domesticated. He never could a-bear cats."

Mrs. Delfoy pleated her skirt and sighed hopelessly at this reflection, but smiled as her companion expatiated on the shortcomings of her spouse. Said he:

"In that Delfoy is *wrong*. Cats are a necessary part of the animal economy. They are the mousetrap of *nature*. This is a world of compromise. Remove cats and we are overrun with rats. Endure cats and our pantries are freed from the rodent. It is our duty, therefore, to tolerate *cats*."

"How delightful!" was murmured from the sofa.

"Delfoy," continued the oracle, "is, I am sorry to say, disposed to be *intolerant*. He cultivates impatience rather than repose, and in that he violates the genius of nature. Nature has its outbursts, its torrents, its avalanches, its earthquakes, and its deluges, but in the main nature is *repose*."

The head on the sofa waved to and fro with the cadence of the sonorous voice. As each platitude rolled forth she clasped her hands responsive to the accent on the last word, and thought it all wonderful and past belief that so much enjoyment could be imparted with so little apparent effort.

"The movement of the million suns of the firmament," he went on, "continue their undeviating course and are the embodiment of reposeful power. Man need not be violent to be strong. Quiet, repose, gentleness, my dear Mrs. Delfoy, are the true evidences of strength and vigour of purpose."

He took his seat beside her, and involuntarily she put her hand in his, and with the other stemmed the welling tears of joy.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Bray," she sighed, "how unfortunate I am."

"We must bear misfortune," he said in modulated tones suitable to the tender emotions. "We must do more, we must bear each *other's* misfortunes."

There was a movement—a little jerk—on the part of the lady in the direction of her companion, and a decided inclination of her head towards his shoulder. A catastrophe seemed to be inevitable.

"Misfortune and distress, my dear Mrs. Delfoy," he murmured, "are the necessary discords in the harmonies of nature."

His companion sighed, and he went on:

"But nature compensates by her affinities; and affinities, we rejoice to know, are nurtured by the pleasures of adversity."

The catastrophe happened. The poor silly head fell, and the heart that was associated with it ceased to plod with the regularity of a pumping-engine, and fluttered in an ecstasy.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Bray, let me dream of happiness," she murmured.

"Yes, dear lady," he apostrophised. "It is indeed a dream—a dream of the unattainable, the impossible, the mirage of existence, the crown of miseries, the apex of distress, the acute unknown."

Gently disengaging himself from the thraldom of her devotion, he rose from the couch, and made a theatrical passage to the centre of the room, where he stood pressing his hands upon his temples as if he were engaged in a process of keeping these overpowering thoughts within bounds. Then, lifting his right hand solemnly, he exclaimed in sonorous bass:

"Let us not attempt to penetrate the mysteries of the great Arcana. Let us beware how we trespass within the circle of the Astral light. No human brain has ever done so with impunity, not even when standing in the midst of the pentegram of the ancient Kabala, and when initiated in all the learning of Zoroaster."

He paused again, and his victim gazed upon his impressive countenance with admiration, not unmixed with awe and even terror. He motioned her with his left hand to be calm, and having walked to and fro for a time or two, he approached her and said:

"Yes, madam. We will dine together. I will call at seven-thirty, and we will seek the retirement of a pleasant hostelry where we can converse in the privacy of the crowd."

The Erechtheum.

There was a strange contradiction in the character of Geoffrey Delfoy. Some of his schemes, especially those founded upon the utilisation of great social forces, exhibited marvellous powers for administration; and in his capacity for reticence and restraint of his unconquerable egotism he showed how high a place he could have taken among the Order of the Jesuits if the spirit that animated him had been corporeally associated with the priestly function. But although a Loyola in administration he always descended, when matters of pleasure and recreation were in question, to the coarse and sometimes brutal strata of social excitement. A glove fight, a main, a turn with the dice, or some other extravagance in gambling, had his preference. Anything forbidden, or at least discouraged, was his favourite resource; and he found means of gratifying his disposition in many ways not commonly accessible.

Among the unusual expedients designed to appease that sort of craving for excitement from which he suffered was the Mushroom Club, an invention of the present epoch, suggestive of ephemeral existence and of rapid growth; and suggestive also of supper. The doors opened at ten at night, and closed at four in the morning, if those present could be got to leave, which was not always. Its members included the artists of the music halls, and others who pretended to be so; and its premises consisted of a supper-room, a dancing-room, and a card-room.

Delfoy was in the card-room. He had made a bank at baccarat, and was the centre of an admiring crowd, who watched with admiration his coolness as he won and lost with varying success.

The hour was early and the players few. As luck seemed to be with the bank, they dropped off, cursing themselves and Delfoy indifferently; and Delfoy was left to yawn and smoke and receive the congratulations of Mademoiselle Lacour, a lady from the Parthenon Music Hall, where she appeared in the character of Diana, and sang songs in the French language that it would have been indiscreet to translate.

"Ah, my dear De la Foi," said the lady, patting him on the cheek with her fan, "you have always the luck. You must stand me my supper, because I have wished you."

"And you are always my good angel, mademoiselle," said he, lounging back in his chair. "But you must wait till one o'clock."

Mademoiselle Lacour shrugged her ponderous shoulders and pouted.

"What for should I wait? You are no longer agreeable, monsieur."

"Necessity, my dear," was the answer, "which, in our blunt country, we say, knows no law."

"It is a beastly country," said the lady, "with beastly climate, beastly people, beastly managers."

"And beastly money," interrupted Delfoy, with a cynical grin. "Come, mademoiselle, don't be angry. Choose my supper for me, and let me, I implore you, attend to the interests of my country for half an hour in the House of Commons while you do it."

Mademoiselle Lacour signified her assent and her resignation with a sigh. Then, sitting down, she added:

"You will play no more to-night." Having said this, she thrust at him a sudden look of passion, and watched him.

"Why so?" he asked with nonchalance.

"You have had the luck, but it is passed, and you can have no more of the luck to-night. I know it," she added fiercely.

"Ah, my little Lacour," said Delfoy, in a vein of gross flattery, for she was very large, "you are always my protector. Make a nice supper, and we will see."

He left the card-room, gave some instructions to the waiter about the supper, which showed a want of confidence in his friend, took a cab at the door, and drove not to the House of Commons but to the Erechtheum, the newest and most fashionable restaurant available for select parties of two.

Delfoy laughed aloud as he lay back in the cab and refreshed his memory by reading a telegram, that he had received at the House of Commons, from Bray. It was more laconic than was usual with Bray. It merely said: "Erechtheum room number eight." And Delfoy laughed again.

His cab stopped in front of a dimly lighted restaurant at the corner of a street abutting on Grantley Circus. His hilarity had disappeared. He seemed to be nervous and excited as he

stepped from the cab; and as he pulled some loose change from his pocket some coins fell on the pavement. He stooped and picked up a couple of shillings, but a third had rolled into the gutter and escaped observation.

"Got 'em, sir?" asked the cabman, in response to the expletive uttered by Delfoy as he groped on the pavement.

"Yes, thank you," he answered; and he handed the cabman double fare, merely because he was anxious above all things to prevent an altercation.

"You're a gentleman, sir," said the cabman. "That's the first real fare I've had to-day. Thank'ee, sir," and he cracked his whip and drove out into the lighted circus in hopes of more of the same kind.

It was a long, low-fronted building, with lace curtains tightly stretched over the windows, after the continental fashion, and it had a dull lamp over the doorway, on which was inscribed in quaint lettering: "The Erechtheum." Inside, everything was arranged in the best taste. Large supper-rooms were entered from the vestibule on either side, and in front of Delfoy was an oriental portière, through which he passed to a staircase beyond. He hurried up two stairs at a time, pushed aside a waiter on the landing, and made for number eight. A waiter barred the closed door.

Delfoy went apart and beckoned the waiter. Putting a sovereign into his hand, he pointed to the room and said:

"There's a lady and gentleman in there?"

The gold provoked truth, and the waiter said there was.

Delfoy nodded approval and said:

"It is necessary that I show myself to them, but you may rely on me that there shall be no disturbance."

"Perhaps you had better ask me to go and fetch something, sir," said the man, with a leer.

Delfoy suggested a brandy and soda, and then asked for the man's address, in case he was afterwards wanted. The next moment Delfoy was in the room, and interrupted Mr. Marmaduke Bray reciting a passage from Byron's "Cain," of all compositions in the world, while Mrs. Delfoy languished on a couch in a trance of unbounded admiration.

Delfoy's appearance was followed by an access of emotion. His wife fainted on the threshold of a scream as Delfoy exclaimed:

"What is this infamy? And you?" he added, turning to Bray.

Bray rose, advanced, and folded his arms as he said:

"This is a private room, sir, and this lady is under my protection."

It was a lame affair—a miserable comedy enacted before an audience incapable of apprehension—a despicable manœuvre that depended for success on the weakness and folly of the victim—and the victim had become unconscious.

The Hotel Farina.

Delfoy observed that the signal light still burnt in the clock-tower of the palace at Westminster, and being subject to a solemn promise to return and vote in favour of a bill then under discussion, for the better protection of young women, and generally designed to secure an improvement in the morals of the people, he made all haste to St. Stephen's instead of at once returning to The Mushroom and Mademoiselle Lacour. He found a committtee of professional moralists in the lobby, who received him with many congratulations on his zeal in the interests of the purity and well-being of the masses, and he responded with gratifying concern for the success of the measure then under discussion.

All this was very agreeable to everybody concerned, and presented a highly garnished exterior to an admiring, although lethargic British public. Delfoy left his companions in the pursuit of legislative purity, and was about entering the House, when he was seized by a smart little man with a large head and black whiskers, but otherwise shaven, and exhibiting in his countenance a firm mouth and a keen dark eye. Said he, without preface or any interest whatever in the subject under debate:

"Will you pair with me? I've a client inside under the gallery waiting for me to go away and do a little piece of business for him."

Delfoy took out his watch, saw it wanted twenty minutes to one, thought of his appointment, and adjourned with his friend to the whips to arrange the pair. Having completed the arrangement, Delfoy immediately left the House for The Mushroom and Mademoiselle Lacour. The next cab that left Palace Yard carried Morris Heritage and Delfoy's pair to the Hotel Farina in Soho, where a curious scene was being enacted between Mr. Mawll of Madrid and Bowdler the great agitator.

The appointment was for twelve o'clock, and up to that hour Bowdler had preserved an appearance of comparative ease. Shortly after midnight, however, he showed signs of nervousness. He was smoking fiercely, and sat huddled in his chair, as was his manner when suffering from enforced inaction. Presently he said hastily:

"He hasn't come, you see."

"No," replied Newmans calmly. "He has not come, but he will come."

"I don't believe it," said Bowdler snappishly; "it's all a plant—a dodge to upset me. Mark me, Newmans," he added fiercely, "if this leaks out I'll be down your track for life!"

"Be good enough to keep quiet, and be good enough also to remember that my name is Mawll," was the firm rejoinder.

There was silence for a few minutes. Then Bowdler put down his pipe and walked the room. Suddenly stopping, he said:

"Look'ee here, Newmans, or Mawll, or anything you like, I've been led into this by *you*."

He spoke loudly, and approached Newmans in a threatening manner as he said it. He assumed, after the manner of his kind, that he was being played false, and he wanted to justify himself to himself, and to discover some way of escape from the net in which he believed himself to be entangled.

"You understand now," he continued. "I'm not committed to nothing, and I've promised nothing, and I'm going right on with this strike, and I'm determined my men shall have their rights."

As Bowdler made this declaration that he was not committed Newmans quietly put his open hand upon the written undertaking lying on the table, which still wanted the amount of the bill and the name of the bankers and, above all, the signature of Bowdler. As the declaration had culminated in the reversal of everything that had before been promised and agreed to Newmans took up the paper, and holding it in both hands, as with the intention of tearing it, he said coldly:

"You are, as you say, uncommitted. Shall we put an end to the business by tearing up this paper and leaving word downstairs that Mr. Bowdler is in the north?"

Bowdler hitched himself round, took up his pipe, muttered something about "twenty thousand quid," and said, as he lighted his pipe:

"Perhaps we had better wait a while."

He smoked for fully five minutes, when the fever of doubt began to reassert itself. He had put his pipe down, and had uplifted his right hand as he sat, with thunder and avalanches gathering in his countenance, when the door opened and it was announced that a gentleman wished to see Mr. Mawll.

"Shut that door and get out," shouted Bowdler, and when the waiter had shut himself out on the landing Bowdler collected his thoughts and said calmly:

"He's come, and look'ee here I shall leave him to you. I'll go into your bedroom and I'll hear what he says, and when it's all square you can come in to me to sign."

Newmans blinked and smiled, but made no reply, on which Bowdler added:

"You see, if he was to come any of his hankey pankey with me, upon my soul I couldn't contain myself."

Newmans merely nodded, as if to say it would be better he should be out of the way, and gave the word to show the gentleman up, while Bowdler slipped into the bedroom and left the door ajar.

Mr. Larcher, who had left the House of Commons with Morris Heritage in the track of Delfoy, was what is known as "a rising" City solicitor, a description usually applied to those who have achieved a reputation and have become independent of encomium. He was versed in commerce, and Heritage had deemed it prudent to take his friend with him in this perilous path he was pursuing, and to have him within call during the interview, in case some new point should arise not hitherto disclosed. Larcher, however, waited in the cab, while Heritage entered the Hotel Farina alone.

Newmans responded to his look of inquiry by telling him that Bowdler was in the building, but that he deemed it prudent to let the business be conducted as heretofore by Newmans.

Heritage made no reply, but produced a bill accepted by Robez, the wealthiest banker in Christendom, for thirty thousand pounds.

"Good," said Newmans; "nothing could be better."

In his old-fashioned methodical way he sat down and filled up the banker's name and the amount of the bill on the letter lying on the table, and as he had filled it up it ran:

"SIR,—As regards a bill for the sum of £30,000 (thirty thousand pounds) drawn by me at thirty days' date, and accepted by Messrs Robez & Co., I acknowledge that this accept-

ance will not be recoverable by me, or by anyone to whom it may be transferred, unless the strike in the iron-smelting trade and the coal trade now existing ceases throughout the United Kingdom within fourteen days from this date; and in the event of the strike not so ceasing I undertake to return the bill within twenty-one days from this date, or twelve days before the due date."

While Newmans was engaged in writing Heritage had come to a conclusion, and when he had read the document he said:

"Now, you had better send for Mr. Bowdler."

"I will procure his signature," said Newmans.

"No," said Heritage, "that will not do. Mr. Bowdler must sign here, and we must see him sign both the document and the bill. I have a friend downstairs who will join us when he is ready."

Newmans looked down and hesitated, upon which Heritage continued:

"You will observe, Mr. Mawll, that in the event of a difficulty—say the death of Mr. Bowdler—it might be said he never signed this paper."

"Who doubts John Bowdler?" said the owner of that name, bursting into the room.

"No one," said Heritage, bowing, with a smile. "No one, Mr. Bowdler. In a business transaction business precautions are necessary. May I send for my friend?"

"Who is your friend?" asked Bowdler, who, having the bodily presence of Heritage before him, and having seen the documents on the table, and being in possession of what had occurred, was now as bold as any bully of any age or country.

"Probably you know him—Mr. Larcher, a member."

"Let me think," said Bowdler.

Bowdler looked about anxiously and breathed heavily as he thought. His lips twitched and his shoulders worked. He could not have been more disturbed if he had contemplated entering upon a trial by ordeal, and that an ordeal of fire. Finally his eye rested on the piece of blue paper with the red bill stamp upon it, and he shouted, as he might have shouted upon dashing into the fire:

"Send for your friend. I'll chance it."

Mr. Larcher appeared, the papers were signed without a word of comment, and the two visitors withdrew.

As they left the room Bowdler sank into a chair, with an exclamation of surprise and—

"My God, thirty thousand, and you take ten of it."

Mr. Newmans smiled.

"Yes," said he, pointing to the bill, still lying on the table, "there it is, and now you've got to earn it."

"For you? No, by God!" and the blasphemous rogue of an agitator put out his hand to take it.

"No," said Newmans. "We must proceed regularly. This document," still pointing at it, "needs your endorsement. If you take it and endorse it you can get money on the name of Robez, which it bears. This must not be done, on account of the undertaking you have given to our friend. No banker would give you money on it if you disclosed that document our friend has taken away, and if you obtained money on it without disclosing the document you would be on the road to penal servitude. I must preserve you from that."

Bowdler scowled at his friend. His hard, cold manner and his precise language annoyed him.

"There, get on," he exclaimed.

"If I hold that document," continued Newmans, again pointing at it, "I cannot use it without your signature, and therefore I submit that I am the proper person to hold it in our mutual interest until your signature is needed."

The mechanical completeness of Newmans' arrangement was a sore trial to the temper of his friend, and he asked petulantly:

"And what next?"

"And next we have to stop the strike," said Newmans.

The result of the conference upon this delicate point was the introduction of a doctor of uncertain status in the profession and the removal of the great agitator in a cab from the Hotel Farina in Soho to the Caledonian Hotel in the Adelphi. He had his right leg bandaged in splints, and he was carried from the four-wheel cab to his bedroom under the superintendence of the doctor. So attended, he telegraphed for his myrmidons on the field of action, and under the guidance of Newmans withdrew his forces and raised the siege, without once communicating with Delfoy and making known his whereabouts or what he was doing.

The only person who remarked that there was anything extraordinary in these proceedings was the cabman, who, in the course of the confidences of the cab rank, said:

"It was a rummy go. A gent walks into my cab at one hotel with his leg bandaged, gets wuss on the road, and is regular carried into the other hotel as if he was a bloomin' infant."

But, as the cabman observed, he was not a private inquiry agent, and it was no business of his.

Joy on Differences.

"Now, I ask you, Mrs. Joy—you sittin' at one end of the table and me at the other, with the entire family around, and 'Arriet with her eye on Gertrude Soul Joy in the cradle in the corner—I ask you, Mrs. Joy, whether you consider me a person likely to sit still when I see anybody disposed to best me? Am I a likely one, Mrs. Joy, to sit quiescent like from a Monday mornin' to a Saturday night while I see men from the City, or what not, puttin' their 'ands right down into the very bottom of my pocket and takin' out the golden sovereigns that I have earned for the good keepin' of my wife and family, sittin' 'ere around at this very minute to partake of the finest leg of boiled pork and parsnips as was ever growed on a dairy farm—now, I ask you, Mrs. Joy?"

Mrs. Joy, who was a very small, fair woman, with weak eyes, answered meekly:

"No, Matthew, you are not."

"Ah, I thought you'd say that. That's exactly what a woman would say, sitting around with her family before a fine leg of boiled dairy-fed pork, with parsnips and pease pudding."

Saying this, he passed the knife to the bone, with a look at Alfred Light Joy, the embryo butcher, to see that he was observing, with a view to proficiency in his trade.

"But you see," he continued, as he sliced away, "I am that person, Mrs. Joy. I am that very person, and the golden sovereigns have been extracted from the very bottom of my pocket, and are being extracted at this very minute, strange as it may seem. 'Arriet, serve the pease puddin', and 'elp yourself to stout. That's a new tap, and finer brown stout never was brewed in the memory of man; but I want to know whether I'm a person likely, as a rule and in a general way, to feel faint at comin' upon a man sudden in the street, and to have palpitations, and be short in the wind, and—"

"Father, what is palpitations?" asked Benjamin Air Joy, with his mouth full of pork and pease pudding.

"Don't interrupt your father," said Harriet, who was responsible for the manners of the rising generation and liked to hear her brother talk.

"Yes, 'Arriet," retorted Joy, "he must interrupt his father when his father's on his own subject. Benjamin Air Joy has a right to information on palpitations and shortness of wind, and he shall have it. Chalk it up, 'Arriet, and get it for him, and take another parsnip. Mrs. Joy, a glass of stout, and pass the jug."

The jug was passed and Joy filled a pint pewter pot with the new tap and took a deep draught before beginning on the boiled pork, during which process there was silence; but not for long.

"Mrs. Joy," said he, sometimes boldly and defiantly, and sometimes in conflict with pork and parsnips and pease pudding, "Mrs. Joy, I ask you, am I disposed and likely to go off in a faint from want of courage, and a fear of my fellow-man, when suddenly come upon—now, I ask you?"

"No, Matthew, I think not," said Mrs. Joy, with a sigh.

"No, Mrs. Joy, you say 'no;' and yet this very day," pursued the pork-butcher, with energy, "I've been run into by friend Vickers so sudden as you might have knocked me down with a feather," and he wielded his knife in the air as if it had been a roystering feather playing havoc with a pork-butcher.

"And talk of the—friend Vickers, here you are," shouted Joy as the portly figure of Mr. Vickers appeared at the doorway, holding his hat in his hand, and wiping his brow with a red silk handkerchief, for it was July, be it remembered, and very hot.

"Yes, Joy, I said I'd come," said Vickers, gradually getting his breath, which had been expended on a hasty ascent of thirty-six steep steps; for the domestic arrangements of the Joy family were carried on at the top of the range of buildings in which the purveying businesses were conducted below.

"Yes, you said you'd come, friend Vickers, and come you have," said Joy. "Now, 'Arriet, a knife and fork for friend Vickers and another pint pot."

Then he repeated his praises of the dairy-fed pork, specially selected for home consumption, and not to be surpassed in the whole world.

"Why, friend Vickers," he exclaimed as fiercely as if his complacent friend had contradicted him a hundred times, "the fat on that leg of pork—dairy-fed, mind yer—is like Devon-

shire cream—like Devonshire cream," he shouted with such vehemence that his guest began to consider whether he had not in a moment of forgetfulness expressed a doubt about the pork. But he had no time to complete his mental inquiry, for the pork-butcher was informing him in stentorian tones that Mrs. Joy was of opinion, openly expressed in the midst of her family, that he was not a man likely to be robbed with impunity, or to be intimidated into taking a course not commended by his judgment; and then, branching off by a circuitous route from this general declaration, he wanted to know why Great Coradells had gone up to fifty per cent. premium after he had sold, and why he should be robbed of that fifty per cent. after he had endured all the agonising throes of a possible loss of every penny he had invested in the enterprise.

"Now, mark me," he shouted at his friend, who was sitting next him, but who could have heard him quite easily at the other end of a three-acre field, "I consider I ought to have that fifty per cent. rise out of somebody, and I want to know who that somebody is."

"Ah," said Vickers, who by this time was busy with the dairy-fed pork, "you missed your chance, but you can get it all back and more by a little deal in pig-iron, as I told you this morning."

"'Old!" shouted the pork-butcher with his knife and fork in the air. "'Old, I say. Edmund Iron Joy, do yer hear your subject referred to? Stand up and hear your subject, and ask questions of the gentleman, who has referred to your subject. Go on, friend Vickers, Edmund Iron Joy is at attention—go on."

Edmund Iron Joy, who had just turned four, had been busy making a clean plate, seated in a high chair, and in accordance with the rules of the Joy method of instruction he rose up and balanced himself on the narrow ledge in front of the high chair, and looked straight before him at the opposite wall, as if he were engaged in executing a conjuring feat on the tight rope; but Mr. Vickers remarked that his countenance was stern, and that he maintained the dignity of the Joy family to admiration.

"Now, mark me," said the head of the family, "I see how it is. I know what's in 'is mind. He's young as yet, friend Vickers, but what he wants to know is: why pig-iron? Iron he knows, and pigs he knows, but pig-iron he doesn't

know; and what I see in the eye of Edmund Iron Joy at this moment is 'Why pig?' Is that so, Edmund Iron Joy?"

"Yes, father," said the youthful acrobat, who, whatever else he was backward in, had learnt obedience. "Yes, father: why pig?"

The father surveyed the company in triumph, and observing a disposition to rise on the part of the youthful Joy, whose business in life was designed to centre in pork, he quickly suppressed him by declaring that the subject of "pig" as commonly understood had not arisen, but only "pig-iron;" and then proceeded to reflect on the ignorance of friend Vickers on a subject of universal knowledge by pointing out to him, in tones that would have reached him if he had still been on the other side of that three-acre field, that a humorist among the ironfounders had designated the big pieces "sows" and the little pieces "pigs."

"And for why?" he shouted to the assembly, so suddenly as to make Edmund Iron Joy start and nearly lose his balance. "'Cause, as they lay in the sand, the big pig and the little pigs looks like the little pigs as is coming up to be dairy-fed pork, a-lying along taking nourishment from their mother afore they're weaned—sit down, Edmund Iron Joy, and think of more questions on your subject for puttin' to your Aunt 'Arriet this afternoon. Friend Vickers, go on."

Friend Vickers was so far disconcerted by the energy of the pork-butcher in carrying out his system of education that his accustomed volubility had quite deserted him; but he ventured, on this appeal, mildly to suggest that if Mr. Joy desired to make money he should buy pig-iron on the rising market, and confided to him that the market was going up day by day, and that enormous purchases had been made that very morning in consequence of the scarcity arising through the strike. The suggestion awakened in the mind of the pork-butcher a profound indignation, and he commenced in solemn tones:

"Now I ask you, friend Vickers, in the presence of Mrs. Joy and the family: what do I want with pig-iron? What could I do with it? Where am I to stack it? Can I eat it? Can I drink it? Can I even make horseshoes of it for my horses? I can do none of these things with pig-iron. Then why, friend Vickers, should I buy pig-iron? Have another drop of stout, friend Vickers, and improve upon your last observations."

He suited the action to the word and helped himself at the same time.

"Perhaps you'd like to sell?" suggested Vickers.

"Sell!" screamed Joy. "Sell, friend Vickers. Why should I sell? What should I sell? I have no pig-iron. I don't make pig-iron. I'm not a ironfounder. I'm not a iron merchant. I ain't even a marine store dealer. How can I sell pig-iron, which I haven't got it?"

Friend Vickers was on the point of becoming unfriendly in his contempt at the ignorance of his host.

"You can sell easily enough without having it," he said. "Go on the market, work the ups and downs of the market, and take your differences."

"I've heard of such things," said Joy solemnly, "but such things is not for Matthew Joy. Now, mark me, all of yer, and especially Mrs. Joy at the other end of the table, and with the family around, exceptin' Fanny Mind Joy in the nursery with Matilda Ann—I suppose she's had her potatoes and gravy as usual, and I see Gertrude Soul Joy sleeping peaceful in the corner—mark me. The day, Mrs. Joy, as I goes on the market—the iron market, or the wool market, or the share market, or the pepper and mustard market, or any other market—and watches the ups and downs of the market, and sells what I haven't got, and buys what I don't want, and can't use in all the purveying businesses as is carried on under the name of Joy—on that day, Mrs. Joy, and all around, discard me as a liar and as an impostor, and as a man unworthy to be a husband and a father, and a bringer-up of youth and innocence to a knowledge of natural history and the trades they've got to carry on, and hand me over to the school board and the Marylebone Police Court and the mussy of the head inspector."

The Pocket Borough.

The flags and banners were flying in the Parliamentary Borough of Gilton on election day, and the polling was being conducted with all the customary vigour and all the usual accompaniments. It was high noon, and the British workman was exciting himself with a combination of three X ale and politics. He had become argumentative, and loquacious, and aggressive in proportion as he imbibed beer, and converted it into incoherencies. The prudent shopkeeper was putting his

shutters up, in view of the argumentative brickbats that would begin flying about, without apparent cause, in the course of the afternoon and evening, by way of demonstrating that the elector was free and independent; and the parish beadle was chaining up the pump for fear any opinionated portion of the community might think cold water a convincing argument. Things had not arrived at the acute stage at one o'clock, but a growing disposition to make positive assertion was observable among the men at street corners and in front of public-houses, without regard to reason or fact, and this also may be put down as a way the average elector has of asserting his freedom and independence.

The Golden Lion was the popular place of resort of the Heritage faction. It was the old established house, and nobody in Gilton would feel that the fundamental principles of the constitution could remain stable for another day if the Golden Lion had not declared in favour of the Heritage interest, which was also the Bolore interest, and the interest of the Lady Alice, the popular, daring, and resolute champion of Gilton institutions. Even the opponents of the Heritage faction, which had inherited the interests of the Foolcher faction, would have felt uneasy if the Golden Lion had renounced its allegiance and declared itself neutral; and whatever the wirepullers might have said, the opposing faction could never have been brought to rejoice over so rank a thing as turpitude on the part of the Golden Lion. And at the door of the Golden Lion, or rather on the footpath outside the stables of the Golden Lion, the supporters of the principles of the Heritage-Foolcher-Bolore interest assembled from time to time to seek that encouragement numbers always afford, especially when the brotherhood is founded upon a predilection for strong ale and vigorous declaration.

The ironfounders' strike in the north had become a prominent bone of contention in the course of the election, chiefly because it had nothing to do with the district, for it has been observed by students of political movements that the less any given body of electors know about or are concerned in a subject the more excited do they get about it, and the more determined are they to have the matter in question settled out of hand, and only in their way. As Gilton was essentially an agricultural district it was only natural it should be desperately anxious about the coal and iron industries of the north, and as Mr. Pardon, who was the candidate opposed to the Bolore

interest, was a friend of Bowdler's, and a terrible fellow for denouncing everybody who had anything to lose or to be appropriated, the strike had become the great feature of the election, and was the general topic of all curbstone conversation.

There was not perfect unanimity outside the gateway of the Golden Lion. There was one man among them who had a grievance against the social economy of the State. He stood with his hands in his trousers pockets and his head bent forward in sullen discontent. His trousers were corduroy and his coat a dirty light-coloured tweed, and he wore a misshapen hat. He was a bricklayer; there was lime about him, and his red hair and whiskers had dust in them. He was saying: "They ain't no right to have carriages and big houses whilst we have no carriages and little houses, with nothing in 'em to speak of," and as he said it his left leg was agitated with a nervous tremor. This movement seemed to have something to do with the production of the idea, for it always accompanied the sullen emphasis of his criticism. The others listened, but said nothing. Those who were smoking pipes went on smoking, and one elderly man, who had put on new clothes for the day, of most surprising newness about the neck and the cuffs, looked at the dissatisfied man and grinned.

"What are you thinking of, George?" asked one of the smokers, a stout young countryman, with a jolly face and a lively twinkle in his eye.

"Why, I was a-thinking, Samuel," said George, "that it would be a bad thing for the carriage building trade if nobody was allowed to ride in a carriage, and a bad thing for Joe here if there was no big houses to build."

With this George laughed immoderately, in enjoyment of his own wit, but Joe the bricklayer merely grunted:

"Why should they have it all and not us?"

"'Cause they've got it," said George, and he laughed again.

"Ah," said Joe, glaring at the middle of the roadway in his sullen distemper, "they won't have it long. The colliers are beginning up north to teach 'em something, for all this 'ere young Heritage says—the young upstart!"

"Well, come now, Joe," said the countryman, who had a fancy for fanning flame, "what do you think of this strike business?"

"I don't think nothing at all about it. I *know*," said the bricklayer. "I know," he repeated, and shook his head with uncommon confidence in his prescience.

"What do you know?" asked George.

"Why, we'll have 'em under our heels in a twelvemonth."

"That's what you know, Joe," said George, "is it? Well, I know somethin' too, and what I know is that every man as is out of 'is job will lose a five-pound note afore he gets to work again, even if he gets to work to-morrow's mornin', and no amount of swearing at 'is job will get that five pound back agin. Time's money all the world over, and you can't strike feedin'."

"Ah," said Joe, with contempt, "you ain't in no Union, I see. You're one of the self-seekers."

"Right!" shouted George. "I'm a self-seeker, and I looks after myself to-rights. But you're mistaken about my not being in a Union, my man. I *am* in a Union—a Union of my own. Me and my missis and the kids is my Union, and we don't have no bullying in my Union."

With this George, who was a small man, and whose new clothes were much too large for him, put his hands in his pockets, as deeply as the cuffs of his jacket would let him, and shook his head from side to side, expressive of his determination to stand by his Union. This was quite an agreeable sally for the amusement of the countrymen, but the continuance of the dispute was made impossible by the approach of a carriage and pair that dashed up to the Golden Lion in great style, bearing the Lady Alice and Dora, dressed in purple and white, on the back seat, and the candidate and Mr. Foolcher, wearing purple rosettes, the party colour, and purple ties and purple gloves. It seemed as if the foundation of the British Empire was in some mysterious way dependent upon the dyeing estab-tablishments of the country, for everybody on the other side was steeped in yellow to the eyebrows, as a protest against purple.

The quartette made a great affair of getting out of the carriage, for, although Mr. Foolcher was much better in health and more free in the limb than when we last saw him, he did not object to assistance, and they all went into the Golden Lion with a great show of business, but which did not appear to amount to more than a desire on their part to shake hands with everybody, and everybody, agreeably responsive, seemed anxious to shake hands with them, always excepting Joe the bricklayer, who preserved an appearance of stoical contempt. So the party re-entered the carriage, having done nothing but shake hands, and the people round the Golden Lion cheered

as they drove away, looking very hot and fagged with hand-shaking, and intensely earnest, especially in the matter of smiles.

And all this time, looking down from an upper window, was a newly arrived traveller, having no connection with the town, but much interested in all that was going on and in all that was being said by Joe the bricklayer and George of the Domestic Union, who had come out in the new clothes for the honour of the polling day. It was Morris Heritage, who had taken it into his head that, although everything looked very promising, as it always does at elections, and while the figures added up, as they always do, with totals showing a triumphant majority, yet he had imagined a reverse to be possible, and he had concluded that a reverse would be a terrible blow to Philip, and that a little moral support would not be a bad thing in such an event. It was accordingly in his mind to wait till the poll was counted, and if things went the wrong way, to declare himself, but if things were well, to go away home again as if he had never been on the ground at all, being fully assured that no assistance would be needed in an hour of triumph.

And it was an hour of triumph. The church bells and the town bells were rung, and the brass band marched through the town at the head of a torchlight procession, and the Lady Alice's carriage, with the new member and the old member in it, was drawn through the town by the triumphant purples, and even the Countess was reconciled to the proceedings by that invulnerable justifier of all actions—success. There was no need of Morris Heritage.

Of course Morris Heritage could not resist joining in the congratulations; but he went off by the late train, and having parted from the railway at a convenient station, he posted fourteen miles in the middle of the night that the triumph should be known by Muriel before he slept.

Bramley Down.

It comes to all men, sooner or later, in their lives to desire repose. Some fight for it, strive for it, hope for it, stretch forth their hand for it and never grasp it. Some even can take it by stretching forth their hands and never put them forth, because an inclination, an ambition, a passion bids them continue in the whirlwind of engrossing life, and they live—

striving with the whirlwind—till the nerves snap and the life goes.

The fearful night spent by Heritage and Muriel, when wrestling with the wretched past, had caused Heritage to resolve, among other things, to get repose—at least for Muriel if not for himself. They had never much concerned themselves with the doings of that wild conglomerate of restless beings that calls itself "Society," with those miserable travesties of the conversazione of the cultured called "At Homes," with that strange passion for being everywhere and doing everything only because everybody else, who wishes to be considered somebody, is desirous of being seen in places that have no interest for them, and in doing things for which they have no aptitude, and which they would never attempt but for the belief that if they did not attempt them they would be lost souls, wandering in the purgatory of obscurity. Morris Heritage, with his wealth, would have been a figure in the maddened circle, but he happened to be endowed with a nature that repelled the pretentious herd of money spenders, who gilded their gingerbread and postured, but said nothing and did nothing but gape and utter inanities and look foolish in their folly. To walk in that circle and be paragraphed by the editor of *The Frivol* was no delight to him, but rather the reverse; and now in the prime of life the notion of repose had charms for him irresistible, and this being so, he bought Bramley Down for Muriel.

It was a grand place. The "down" was a long stretch of short springy turf by the roadside, stretching for two miles on the flat, and rising on one side some five hundred feet, with varying undulations, and about two miles from the main road was the house, a castellated structure called "The Lodge," of no period and no character other than its own; but picturesque with its ivy and its creepers, its walled gardens and its acres of stabling, and its mossy walls and ancient trees, full of rooks, who are quick to learn where they are safe.

Down in the hollow was a village, where simple life was lived in small, lattice-windowed, red-brick houses, covered all over with creepers, and each with its little garden in front, that enriched the scene with colour and the air with perfume, and so smiled on the cottager day by day for thanks as he tended it.

And near the village was the church, with a pathway through the burial ground and a turnstile to keep the cattle

out, and a parsonage with a white-haired incumbent, all gentleness and purity of thought, who by his ministrations made the locks and bolts of the police station rusty and as useless as the mossgrown stocks preserved up the lane as a memorial of old times—still with the rusty padlock on the hasp, and all grown around with nettles, as if the seeds of iniquity had fallen from those who had been placed in them and had grown up to symbolise the stings it had inflicted.

A happy combination of circumstances had placed this eminently out-of-the-world place at the disposal of Heritage, and he bought it outright, in the course of an afternoon's inspection of it, just as it stood; accepted the obligation of continuing every servant in the house and on the estate just as he found them; and entered into possession within a week, as if he had been taking a furnished house for a month or two. So, as the world of fashion hurried on in its fervid course, and Society distressed itself with the fears and hopes that harass its poor brains, Muriel found peace and quiet at Bramley Down with Ethel, while Dora took the path of war with the Lady Alice and Philip, and revelled in the triumphant crusade among the yellows of the pocket borough.

It was a late breakfast at The Lodge next morning, and a comfortable sensation of contentment and rest pervaded the sober three, who found Bramley Down so very much to their minds. No doubt they were all thinking of Philip in his triumph; and now and then a word or two escaped them as they sat or walked, and they would each read the papers—all the papers, though they were all alike—just to see whether they differed; and the sun shone and the birds sang and the rooks cawed, and the cattle basked in the meadow as the peaceful morning grew, and they were happy in their loves.

Then a walk through the estate, and a kindly talk with its quaint people, who had scarce ever lifted foot beyond the county in which they had been born; and out through the village to the schoolhouse, and after transacting a little business at the post office they would drive to the neighbouring town and lunch at The Crown and Mitre, quite out of the world, where the first business of mankind was dry fly fishing and passing interest in South Down mutton.

The sedate trio were a little disturbed, and withal somewhat amused, during their lunch by the arrival of a dashing couple, who had also driven to the town and proposed to lunch. They consisted principally of a suit of very large

shepherd's plaid upon a somewhat portly person, known as Lascelles Shout, proprietor of the "Great Cæsar Borgia Company"—the greatest metropolitan success of the century—and Mrs. Shout, *nee* Laura Vickers, in a Duchess of Devonshire hat and feathers and a costume of blue serge, covered with dust. Mr. Shout was loud voiced, boisterous, and imperious in his commands, particularly on the subject of wines. He condemned everything on the card, but ultimately put up with Roederer, and began with a brandy and soda.

Being in a desperate hurry, in consequence of a business appointment in the town where they "opened" in the following week; and having to return in time for the evening performance at Chedbury, whence they had driven, they accepted the joint of the house and fell to with vigour. Being apparently possessed with a desire to leave no one in ignorance of their identity or their occupation they discussed their affairs in a loud voice, maintained a running commentary on their immediate surroundings, and took the waiter into their confidence as regards the prospects in the town they proposed to honour and instruct, by holding up the glass to nature in good Cæsar Borgia fashion. But suddenly, in the very middle of a remark of no consequence, but as loud as the rest of the conversation, Mr. Shout stopped dead, dropped his knife and fork, uttered an exclamation of the most horrible import, and drank a tumbler of champagne with a shudder.

"What's up now?" inquired his energetic spouse, and turned for explanation to the party in the other corner of the room, where she had seen her husband's eyes fixed as if in a trance. She found no explanation there, and looked at her silent and trembling husband with an equally barren result: for Shout's eyes remained fastened on the placid face of Muriel, and visions of an iron church in an improving neighbourhood burst upon his brain, with a cabman and a caretaker drinking whisky and water in honour of a bride.

"Now, look here, Shout," she said solemnly, "you've got 'em again, and I won't stand it. Just you hand that bottle over here, and stow drinks for the rest of this tour."

"All right, my dear," said Shout eagerly, "take the bottle, I'm going out to look after the horse."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LORD OF LUCKROSS.

MR. GEOFFREY DELFOY, M.P., was happy in the reflection that things were moving aright. The ironworkers' strike had assumed gigantic proportions, and prices had advanced to his entire satisfaction. He was calculating, in the quiet of the Albany, that another fortnight of this work would make it advisable for him to sell, take his profit, and let the strikers manage their own affairs without his assistance. He calculated that by this scheme he would be the gainer by a million, and the only regret he had at this remarkable epoch of his career was that he had no one by him to whom he could talk about it. He had not yet heard of Bowdler's accident, but had received a certified demand for a contribution of twelve thousand pounds, which he had paid in gleeful anticipation of recovering it tenfold.

It was natural, in these circumstances, that Delfoy should turn his attention to other schemes, and he reflected that it was his duty to visit Luckross and prepare the way for future triumphs. He concluded that it would be proper for the parishioners to receive him with acclamation, and that the quiet of Luckross should be disturbed by a demonstration. He doubted, however, whether material existed in Luckross to achieve this result, so necessary from a public point of view, and it consequently became incumbent upon him to import the requisite enthusiasm.

We therefore find Geoffrey Delfoy, M.P., in his dressing-gown and slippers, reading his *Times* and taking his breakfast in the Albany, and grinning consumedly over the speech of Philip Heritage upon returning thanks to his constituents, when Dubley brought in a telegram and announced the arrival of an expected visitor—Mr. Holvery, the eminent contractor.

The telegram announced that pig-iron had risen twopence on the opening of the market, and that Lohman & Last had bought a thousand tons and sold five hundred at a fractional

rise, according to order. Delfoy wrote a telegram in reply, ordering his brokers to sell sparingly at the higher price, but otherwise to remain inactive. He wanted to see what the market did without his interference—a resolution that gave Messrs. Lohman & Last much anxious thought during the day. Delfoy also experienced a passing anxiety between the despatch of this telegram and the appearance of Mr. Holvery.

"Where's Bowdler?" said he to himself. "I haven't heard from him for three days. He's pretty hard at it, I fancy."

Having reached this consoling reflection he renewed his study of *The Times*, and in a few minutes Mr. Holvery was announced—a fair, thin man, with a bald head, a slight stoop, and a restless manner, a low, sweet, insinuating voice, and a deep-set eye that sparkled. The eye and the voice had led him through the world, and, thus heralded, obstacles to his progress seemed to wither at the touch of his delicate, thin hand, that could grip, notwithstanding its fragile appearance, like an instrument of steel.

Mr. Holvery was not an ordinary contractor. He did not make railways and build bridges and feed armies. He contracted in the more subtle if more humble departments of human affairs. He dealt particularly in the comforting associations of man's existence; and it was commonly reported that he had several contracts on hand, by which he had undertaken to see certain persons through life, from the cradle to the grave—to feed them from infancy to old age, to clothe them, educate them, provide them with pocket-money, on a sliding scale consistent with the period of life at which they had arrived, and to bury them on their decease. It was not, of course, anticipated that Mr. Holvery would remain alive personally to conduct his clients to their respective graves, but his powers of administration had been equal to providing deputies, in the shape of enduring corporations, to complete the contract, on the natural assumption that the infant subjects of the contracts would outlive him. Nobody doubted Holvery's capacity, and everybody envied the happy condition of those he was conducting through life, seeing that he was bound to keep them going, and that their circumstances prevented them ever getting into debt or contracting liabilities on their own account.

Mr. Holvery also contracted to supply enthusiasm in any part of the United Kingdom upon twenty-four hours' notice,

and of every variety—political, social, municipal, domestic, imperial, or local, and in any form. Geoffrey Delfoy, M.P., besought his assistance in this respect, and Mr. Holvery had come himself to take the necessary instructions, attracted by the great public reputation of his new client.

"You see," said Delfoy, gradually unfolding the subject to the great purveyor of public enthusiasm, "I have not been near the place for the last twenty years, and I don't know how it looks, nor what state the village is in, nor who the people are; and I want you to find out its resources and use them, as far as they go, and supplement them so as to make a good show in the London papers.

Mr. Holvery intruded with a slight cough and said:

"May I ask whether a report in the London papers is your objective point?"

"Well—yes," said Delfoy reflectively, "I suppose that is it—yes. Now it's very strange, Mr. Holvery, I never saw it in that light before, but unquestionably that is the light in which to view it."

Mr. Holvery smiled and said apologetically, in his dulcet tones:

"I always like to get at the objective point first, and work it out as circumstances permit."

"Yes," said Delfoy, reflecting still, "that's quite wise—yes, quite wise. Now I suppose, Mr. Holvery, it couldn't be managed to get a report in the London papers without the preliminary absurdities, and save the trouble of them—for this is going to bore me frightfully, you know."

Mr. Holvery shook his head as he answered:

"It might be managed; I have known cases in which it has been managed, but the experiment is dangerous, and I do not recommend the attempt. It is always prudent to have a fact to go upon."

The Member of Parliament waved the subject back to Mr. Holvery as he said, "Give me your ideas," and the contractor proceeded to check off the points as if he were reading a catalogue at a sale.

"Return of the old family after long exile. Villagers, tenants, parson, schoolmaster, neighbouring proprietors—"

"No," interrupted Delfoy, "neighbouring proprietors doubtful."

"They may be approached?" inquired the contractor.

"I think not," answered Delfoy. "I prefer not."

"There will be yourself," pursued the contractor, "and your wife."

"No," said the member, "not my wife—my mother and my sister. My wife, I regret to say, has misbehaved herself."

He waved the subject away as being disagreeable and invited Mr. Holvery to proceed.

"Well, sir, there will be the oldest inhabitant. I presume he can be got?"

"No doubt; the parson will dig him up, and you must put him in order. The oldest inhabitant will, no doubt, be glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Holvery, and will be a feature. If possible he could be utilised to read the address—and now about the address. Of course I should know nothing about it, but I suppose you can provide that document, along with the flags and banners and the Venetian poles—some poor devil of a literary hack can turn that out for you, eh?"

Mr. Holvery would undertake to provide fifty addresses in the course of the afternoon, in any variety, each provided with a Shakesperian quotation or a classic, according to taste and the character of the audience. Mr. Holvery declared he could put his hand at any moment upon what he described as an "extinct Cambridge Don," as if he were speaking of an exhausted volcano, of rare capacity in the matter of addresses; and he assured his new client that Royalty had been provoked to a condition of enthusiasm by some of the Corporation addresses provided by the same pen.

"Very good," responded Delfoy. "Then we'll have the 'extinct Cambridge Don' turned on, and you can make a note or two for him. Suppose now you throw in a word of sympathy about my wife's proceedings. She's gone off, you know, with a rascally newspaper editor."

"Scarcely a subject," suggested Holvery, "for a congratulatory address from a conventional point of view."

"Ah," said Delfoy, "no doubt you're right; but I want something sympathetic thrown in, because, you know, I've been devilishly ill-used one way and the other."

"What about your father?" inquired Holvery. "Will he do? He would be quite permissible?"

"That's not exactly the thing I want," said Delfoy, musing. "I see your point, but I want something more personal. A father, you know, is ordinary and commonplace. Perhaps," he added, after a pause, "it would be better if we put up with him, but I think you should get in the phrase 'domestic

troubles.' The inference would be apparent, and that is what I require."

"Yes," said Mr. Holvery in a tone which meant "No" as plainly as tongue could speak, and he made a note.

"Don't misconstrue me," said Delfoy, who marked the inflection of the delicate voice. "We are bound to deal with these matters apart from personal feeling and from an artistic point of view."

"Certainly," said the contractor. "I was looking at it purely from that point of view as controlled by the objective point already stated. I should not like to see a phrase in a leading article in the *Post*, say, on a matter that had been entrusted to me, suggesting 'questionable taste,' say, or some other criticism that I could not challenge. It is necessary to be careful in these matters. They are delicate, sir, I assure you, they are very delicate."

"Yes, yes, of course they are; but, my dear fellow,"—Delfoy grew familiar in his earnestness—"she will never defend the action seriously; she's enraptured with the man. He has fascinated her." Then he added, in a calm, judicial tone: "I admit she's weak. She always was, but that is part of my case," and he settled down to a dispassionate contemplation of the carpet, as if that were another part of his case.

Mr. Holvery said he would make a note. His professional reputation would permit him to go no further. He did not say so, but what he meant was that he and the "extinct Cambridge Don" would talk it over, and maintain the reputation of the greatest contractor that ever lived.

So Delfoy reverted to the dinner to the tenantry, and suggested three *entrées* and a savoury for the upper table, "to make it endurable, you know; and we'll have the parson and the newspaper men there. I'll ask Squarely of *The Frivol* myself, and my mother and sister will be the only ladies."

There was another telegram from Lohman & Last saying that the market was undecided; and again Delfoy wondered why he had no communication from Bowdler. He felt nervous as he showed the contractor out, discoursed absently about the oldest inhabitants, about placing funds at the disposition of the parson, and he repeated many times, as his mind wandered in the direction of fields of pig-iron, that, in any case, he would do whatever was necessary. But he returned and walked the room, saying to himself, "Where's Bowdler? What can he be doing?" Ultimately, finding consolation in cursing

Bowdler, he dressed, had lunch at the Peelton Club, and went down to the House of Commons to make laws for the controlling of other people.

. . . . . .

It was a sad sort of consolation that the Lady Grace experienced in the triumphal return to Luckross. Holvery had done his part well. There were plenty of banners and Venetian poles. A gigantic triumphal arch, kept in stock by him for emergencies, created an immense sensation among the villagers; but the villagers were few, and dispirited by long neglect. Although supplemented by half-a-dozen pairs of good strong lungs from the county town they cheered feebly for such an occasion. It was not the absence of colour or eloquence or cheering that troubled the Lady Grace, and it is probable that she never detected the artificiality that surrounded the gloom of the rejoicings. For her the triumph had come too late. It is true it was Geoffrey who accompanied her up the drive and over the bridge and under the ancient gateway, and a little tenderness was provoked within her callous breast at sight of some of the old faces, so long denied the nurturing hand that theory, and in some cases practice, associates with the resident proprietor, but "Too late," "Too late" was the ever-recurring motto on the banners, and the constant chorus to the grandiloquent address provided by the "extinct Cambridge Don." It seemed to her as if the world, as she had hoped for it, had died, or had, like herself, wearied of waiting for the promised glories, and was fading gradually into a state of settled gloom, never to be bright again.

And Grace, the hard, bold, strong, managing Grace, too, was soured, and seemed unable to encourage hope, or even to smile. She had become angry with the world; and now, as the prospect had opened of better times, she schemed revenge upon the people who had angered her in the past by being prosperous and gay; and most of all she schemed revenge upon herself, but never thought of that.

So the people cheered, and the brass band struck up "See the Conquering Hero comes," and the schoolmaster read the address, and the oldest inhabitant, in a new suit of corduroy, presented it, and the parson sanctified the imposture by his earnest welcome and his grave sincerity.

Squarely kept his spirits up by lecturing Mr. Vickers upon the art treasures of the Castle, and Vickers kept his up by assisting "the gentlemen of the press" to sherry and bitters.

But the gloomiest and most distressful member of the party was the hero of the day himself. He was nervous and uneasy. Telegrams had been following him all day, and, though varied in language, upon all of them was written in bolder characters than any on the banners in the streets or on the walls of the hall, "No buyers" and "Bowdler still in bed." Lohman & Last had exhausted their vocabulary of hope, and had rung the changes to distraction upon "a flat market," "a nervous market," "an uncertain market," and "a timid market"; buyers had been described as "shy," as "cautious," as "waiting," and as "hesitating," coupled with hints of differences among the strikers and the discovery of a more confident tone on the part of the ironmasters. How could Geoffrey Delfoy be other than irritable?

The banquet was a relief to all. Squarely was boisterous in his gluttony, and Vickers profuse in his panegyrics. There was no want of appreciation of Holvery's notion of Luckross hospitality on the part of the friends at the upper table, and the tenantry forgot their troubles in this advent of a golden era, consisting chiefly of roast beef and strong brown ale.

Whether the consequences of the abundant supplies would have prevented the proposed speechmaking cannot be said, because the period of trial was never reached. When the banquet was about three parts exhausted there came another telegram. Delfoy read it and turned pale. He clutched at the table and looked round for Dubley, standing by his elbow, with that look of terror in his face which Dubley had come to understand. In a moment, before the company was aware that anything unusual had occurred, Delfoy was drinking half a tumbler of neat brandy, and his neighbours thought he was tasting the brown ale to see that his tenantry were being well served.

His sister, sitting next the clergyman on Geoffrey's left, was an exception to the rest. She saw and understood: the lines on her hard face were deeper drawn, and she was prepared for a catastrophe. Geoffrey recovered some portion of his equanimity as he crumpled the telegram in his hands and gazed with a firm-set face down the long table; but a tremor passed through his frame, and it needed another and even heavier glass of the substitute for old brown ale to bring the nerves to their bearings. Then he turned to the parson and asked him to take his place for a few minutes as he felt unwell, and it was necessary for him to lie down awhile in private. So he

left the large hall of Luckross, having played the part of resident owner for an hour.

By the time the parson had begun to wonder whether or not he should send for his host, since the few minutes which he had spoken of had drawn out to half an hour, Delfoy was on the road to London, never to return. The telegram had said: "Strike collapsed—men go in to-morrow," and he cried aloud to his gods for the blood of Bowdler; but when he reached the Caledonian Hotel in the Adelphi, Bowdler was reported to be delirious and babbling of green fields.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BULLS AND THE BEARS.

It was reported in all the most veracious channels of information that Mr. Bowdler's unfortunate illness had been much aggravated by the mental suffering he experienced through the unfortunate position of the ironworkers in the north. It was also stated that his recovery would be slow, but that having been forbidden to transact any business whatever, or to receive any visitors, it was hoped that in a fortnight's time it would be possible to move him to a watering-place on the south coast.

A great many people, from various motives, made attempts to get speech of him, but the approaches to his retreat were jealously guarded; and the same answer being given to every applicant at the threshold of the hotel, none even mounted the first flight of stairs, much less penetrated the inner chamber, where two hard-featured, resolute men played cards and dominoes all day long, except when they smoked and drank and quarrelled and schemed as they waited the maturing of a bill accepted by the Messrs. Robez. Sometimes they had a third with them, who drank and smoked and played cards with more determination than either of them. He was the doctor, a young man of vigorous constitution, and with few patients apparently, for he spent most of his waking hours in the company of this particular patient and his most devoted attendant, Mawll, who never left "the poor gentleman who was ill," as they said in the hotel, day nor night, to the great surprise and admiration of everybody in the place.

They had a suite of excellent apartments overlooking the river, and made themselves particularly comfortable by the aid of the doctor, who not only looked at his patient's tongue every morning and felt his pulse and took his temperature with much solemnity but acted as messenger between the interesting couple and an office hard by, where the strike organisation was being carried on or off as times and necessities changed.

The peculiar relations of each to the other of this trio had

come about without any precise arrangement in detail beyond the fact that the youthful doctor had his special function marked out for him. Newmans, in a hazy way, had anticipated a daily walk in the dusk of the evening during this period of suspense, but from the moment he laid it down as a principle of action that it was his duty to take charge of the bill his friend Bowdler concluded that it would not be prudent to let him out of his sight; and whenever the slightest suggestion was made by Mawll that a little walk would do him good Bowdler at once resisted the proposal with a most determined "No, you won't."

It is probable that many a man has a notion that a month of complete idleness, with a supply of tobacco, cards, and other resources of indolence, would be a sort of elysium, but if associated with compulsory seclusion experience would teach them that the elysium in question had its drawbacks; and it is easy to understand that a month's devotion to cards and dominoes, relieved only by the perusal of the daily papers, would become monotonous notwithstanding they contained most agreeable references to the settlement of the strike and the distressing illness of Mr. Bowdler, M.P.

"Now, look you here," said Bowdler, on an occasion when Newmans proposed a walk for himself, "you're not a-going out till you go with me to get that coin, and then we go in a four-wheeler with the doctor, and we go right away to Paris."

Newmans, who was at great pains to keep up the character of his hair and eyebrows, was rather disconcerted by this, and said he could not understand the objection to his taking a little walk, say on Adelphi Terrace.

"Can't you?" responded Bowdler. "Then I can. You was good enough to say that I might raise money on that bill that you've had the impudence to put into your pocket, and that you considered it was your duty to prevent me a-doing of it. Now I consider it's my duty to prevent you a-doing of something worse than that, and you know what it is. But as you seem to be making believe you don't know what it is," he continued, getting exasperated at his friend's immobility and coming forward with a menacing look, "I'll tell you. It's my duty, Newmans, to prevent you a-forging of my name on that bill, and that's why you've got to stop along of me till we go to Robez's together, and why we don't go out of here till we do go to Robez's together; and look'ee here, Newmans—and I'll always call you Newmans whenever you annoy me—when we go to

Robez's together Robez shall do the dividing of the proportions—mine to me and yourn to you, and I'll never touch your bit and you won't touch my bit, s'elp me."

And Bowdler made a deep respiration after this expenditure of breath, and put his hands in his trousers pockets and marched round the room once, bringing himself up by the window and looking out across the Thames to scowl in envy at the boatmen in their freedom going to and fro.

Newmans heard the declaration in silence, followed his companion with his eye, and then, as Bowdler brought himself up, said, "Very good;" but there was malice in his eye.

There was no more said about exercise in the open air, and the two prowled backwards and forwards in their cage, each on his own side, like a couple of tigers ready to spring at each other's throat, and would have done so but for fear of the keeper, which in this case was no other than that mysterious and undefined power "public report," that might have led anywhere if once it got possession of a single thread of truth about the lives of these two malignant beings.

The strain upon the amiability of the two prisoners was relieved by the return of the doctor, who recommended a John Collins and cribbage, and the advice was taken.

The doctor was a stout young man, more fond of beer than medicine, and very fond of his pipe. He lighted up as the two took their places at table, and when he had them fairly at work, with "two for his nob and one for his heels," he announced his intention of making a call, and said he would be back by dinner time.

Bowdler played with great determination, and was not at all pleased when Newmans counted the fifteens in undue proportions. He was more annoyed at his friend's manner than his success, for when Newmans made a point or two he did not rejoice openly, but chuckled and hugged himself in a confidential and satisfied way that made Bowdler think of the bill in his pocket, and made him more than ever want to get it out of Newmans' pocket and into his own.

The persistency with which the luck remained with Newmans added to his skill, and his winnings grew apace. The incident reduced Bowdler to a most unreasoning prejudice against his friend, caused him to make sinister observations as to the origin of the luck, and induced him to rise up and walk the room between the deals. These walks did not appease him, for a flood of dreadful doubts rushed upon him as to the future,

and he would turn and look at Newmans, methodically shuffling the cards, with quite a murderous look.

The arrival of the first batch of evening papers relieved the strain. They had the entire issue of the daily literature of London, and a good many of the papers published in the country as soon as they could be procured, and a blessed relief it was. The arrival of each paper was followed by a regular search throughout all the columns to see what they afforded of personal interest to them and their hopes. Accordingly, on the arrival of the evening papers they left the cards on the table and each took a paper to the window.

"There's another busted," said Bowdler, who always looked to the commercial news first. "A banker this time, and for a good round sum. Pigs is down to forty shillings and fourpence and no buyers. Lord! what a twister it's given 'em."

"Yes," said Newmans, in response to this pious comment, "it has shaken a few houses of position."

Newmans looked round as he said this, as if he had supposed someone might be near to convict him of slander. Bowdler was less discreet and less conscious of turpitude when discussing as a statesman and philosopher the delinquencies and follies of commercial men.

"Yer see, there's a lot of bad work goin' on in the City that wants exposin'," said Bowdler, leaning back in his chair. "Yer know, Mawll, this'll do a deal of good this kick up. Why, yer know, it'll work out the bad firms and solidify trade. That's what it'll do, and it's a good thing to do it."

Bowdler said this with an air of conviction that would have done credit to a Prime Minister, and Newmans half veiled his eyes as he answered:

"Yes, it will solidify trade."

"There's a deal too much speculation going on, you know, and too little legitimate trade," pursued Bowdler, with the paper on his knee. "It's legitimate trade we want, eh?"

"Yes," acquiesced Newmans, "legitimate trade;" and they began to read again.

"I don't see nothing more," said Bowdler dolefully.

"Here's an item of some interest," responded Newmans, "respecting Delfoy."

"Eh?" cried Bowdler, all excitement. "Out with it."

"It's a paragraph all by itself," said Newmans, "and it says: 'There are rumours current concerning the probable failure of a prominent Member of Parliament who has recently

been spoken of as likely to take office. It is stated that the embarrassment has been caused by speculations in pig-iron during the recent crisis in commercial circles. The liabilities are said to be heavy.'"

"Give it 'ere," said Bowdler, reaching out his hand. He took the paper and read it eagerly, looked about him, shook his head, and then took a walk round with his hands in his pockets. After going the round of the room twice he came up to Newmans, who was continuing his examination of the papers quite unmoved, and said in a persuasive tone:

"You know, this 'ere Delfoy had no call to dŏ this. He's been greedy, you know, and he's a domineerin' sort of fellow—a domineerin' aristocrat *I* call him. I never reelly liked him, you know. He was always so patronisin', especially when he wanted you to do him a favour. *I* think it serves him right."

With this Bowdler took another walk; and having been solaced with the reflection that the commercial air was being purified, and that Delfoy was getting the natural deserts of greed and domineering, and having specially congratulated himself on the presumption that everybody appeared to have forgotten Bowdler, he proposed to resume the game of cribbage with Mr. Newmans, who found him quite agreeable company.

. . . . . .

Day by day the uneasiness in the City increased, and the list of failures was added to, not only by those who could not help themselves but by others less involved, who thought it a convenient opportunity to free themselves from embarrassments that in less turbulent times would have been fought against with unvarying energy. The panic extended to every branch of trade, and was aggravated by a feeling of distrust and a refusal of all concessions that at other times would be the common incidents of trading.

It is a curious incident associated with commercial panic that it is only in rare cases, such as the failure of a great bank, coming like a bolt from the blue, that the origin of the movement can be discovered. In practice it is never discovered, because, as in this instance, not only is the cause intentionally hidden, but the consequences are so far-reaching, and the temptations to malversation provoked by it are so numerous and so varied that catastrophe, in the first instance, results in some quarter far removed from the initial cause; and when the failures react step by step, as they must until they reach

the initial cause, those who should have suffered first are looked upon as victims.

In this way it came to pass that Geoffrey Delfoy, M.P., was regarded as an imprudent person and nothing more. The measures taken with him, however, were none the less drastic. Lohman & Last went to the wall long before the vengeful spirit of commercial law put its hand upon him. He was merely an asset of the estate of Lohman & Last to begin with, and when he had developed into a defaulter the entire City was in fear of shadows, and the Stock Exchange would have sacrificed to Plutus every morning before making quotations if it had known how to set about the work of propitiation.

Even when the blow actually fell upon him Delfoy was unable to construe the extremity to which he had come. Gamblers never add up: they have a prejudice against it, and by the time someone else had added up for him he had ceased to have a personality in law, and was represented by a trustee, to whom in sullenness he handed over, one by one, his wrecker's gains.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE WRECK.

Poor Dubley, sitting in his little pantry and gloomily contemplating a tray of broken crockery, was conscious of a terrible presence on the other side of the passage—unwashed, unshaven, blear-eyed and dishevelled—almost naked save for a pair of braceless trousers and a torn jacket above a sleeping suit of flannels. The figure lay for hours on the couch or huddled in the easy-chair, or else would be stretched prone upon the hearthrug, according as the capacity for motion and control was still existent or wholly gone.

The daily routine was maintained. The newspaper was aired but never read; the boots were varnished afresh but never worn; the breakfast was prepared but remained untasted; the mutton chop was grilled and served only to be removed untouched. No solid food of any sort had passed the monstrous animal's lips for a fortnight save a few biscuits left about the room as if by accident, that he might meet with them as he shuffled to and fro; and these he took as if by stealth. Poor Dubley, still faithful and devoted even in this extremity, watched for their disappearance and supplied others. Moreover, he removed the brandy to unaccustomed places, watered the bottles that were demanded peremptorily, and obtruded mutton chops and kidneys and *pâté de foie gras* incessantly at all hours of the twenty-four in hopes of arresting the debauch. A vigorous attempt to intrude a reasonable breakfast on this very morning had resulted in a savage onslaught, and a catastrophe in the shape of broken crockery and a broken head. Poor Dubley, sitting in his little pantry, with his chin in his hands, and surrounded by the material tokens of his devotion and his master's debasement, was indeed the more miserable of the two, since he was conscious of his misery and of its cause.

The collapse was complete. Had the attack come less suddenly upon him Delfoy might have faced it and triumphed

by means of an early and judicious compromise; but the strain of the few months anterior to the closing of the strike had left him with but a small reserve of strength and without a shred of initiative. Moreover, it happens to be the interest of those who live by the misfortune of others to decline compromise and avoid settlements. The liquidation of a large estate affords infinite opportunity for the creation of complications and the discovery of contentious matter. Accountants and solicitors being human and trained to acquisitiveness, it is natural that debtor and creditor alike should suffer when the elastic rules of commerce are strained to breaking point by commercial cormorants.

The chief cormorant in this case was the victim's friend, adviser, confidant, confederate—John Huckle. It is always so. In the light and airy way of the Commercial Cormorant in his first flight the victim was solaced by sarcastic allusions to the absurdity of regarding the events as serious. The catastrophe was not only made light of but forty shillings in the pound was talked about as the least possible estimate of the assets. John Huckle slapped his friend on the back and bade him cheer up; but when the trust deed had been signed, an accountant appointed, and the future of the estate had become a question of legal controversy, of forced sales, and of costs and charges, John Huckle assayed the debtor, shook his head over the business, and assumed the manners of the austere monitor. Men of sterner calibre than Geoffrey Delfoy have succumbed to the wearing down of their nerves by the Commercial Cormorant. He made the only effort at resistance he had ever been capable of: he sought the stimulant that, as yet, had never failed him, and essayed to guide the wreck into harbour; but the strain was protracted beyond his strength, the stimulant no longer had the power to carry the brain and the nerve over the crest of the wave—and he went down!

A desperate remedy, desperately applied, had failed to revive the depleted energies of the shattered man; and having exhausted its power as a stimulant, it harried its suppliant as if in revenge for exhibiting its incapacity, and flung him to the ground, even as the devils of hell are said to rend a man and fling his flaccid carcase to the winds when it ceases to be potential for evil. The element that no longer had the power to warm and to inspire was still free to destroy; and day by day and hour by hour it bore its victim to the ground, and held him there in moody brutishness.

And yet there was something more than a sodden carcase lying on the other side of the passage as Dubley wrestled with the great social problem involved in the broken teacups and the broken head. The spirit of the man was in thraldom, but it was there, struggling for ascendency as it had ever done in the midst of the clay. Can we not imagine its desperate evolutions within the benumbed and prostrate frame? Was it not ever striving to assert itself—ever rising out of the fathomless whirlpool into which it had been cast—groping fatuously for life, volition, power to act? And even as the perception of renewed vitality seemed to be within its grasp did it not seek to hasten that revival by the accustomed fillip; and did it not, instead of mounting to the crest of the wave by the old enchantment, find itself speeding headlong once again to the very utmost depths, again to begin the weary round of palsied groping in a poisoned brain? See how it writhes, swirling in endless eddies, and with interminable strivings, ever and anon clutching at shadows in the vain endeavour to burst the bonds and rise again to manhood and to life; and see how, ever and anon, in defiance of all things in heaven and upon earth, it seeks for evil purpose and gropes for instruments wherewith to strike at holiness for being holy in the aimless fury of its impotence.

Living as he had lived, in exclusion from all save those whom he had from time to time summoned to hear his mandate and then dismissed to do his bidding, he was alone now—less cared for by the world than even he had cared for any pleading creature in the past. Dubley alone of all the many servitors and parasites who once had waited on his every word—the patient, all-enduring Dubley alone remained to make an effort to wrest his spirit from the demon that possessed him.

God knows how little there is of purity of purpose and self-denial in any heart of all the living beings on the earth. God knows how bold, and arrogantly shameless Self sits enthroned within each little kingdom called a Man, and, being arrogant and bold, inflates the boundaries of its realm and deems assumption virtue. And yet deep down within each heart the germ of truth and all the myriad godlike attributes that give the crown to man's inheritance lie hidden even in the worst of us—ay, and may be found and nurtured by those who have the talisman, and, being rescued from its living grave, may grow to rich fruition. But Dubley's was a poor hand to delve in such a heart as Geoffrey Delfoy's, encrusted

with the turgid growth of years and wrapped in a loathsome egotism. Nor more was Shout's much better suited for the work; yet Shout was the good Samaritan summoned by Dubley in this season of grievous need, and Shout's welcome ring was heard on this Sunday morning as Dubley nursed his chin and groaned at the broken crockery or swathed his broken head.

The Cæsar Borgia Company had been playing down in the West of England the latest domestic drama of passion and debauchery, "licking up," as Mr. "Lascelles" Shout expressed it, the smaller towns in the provinces, while London audiences applauded for the two hundredth time this latest effort of dramatic genius.

"Ah!" said Dubley, as he opened the door, "ah! Mr. Shout, how very glad I am to see you—how very glad!"

Dubley lifted up his hands as in adoration of the appearance of his master's friend. His dishevelled appearance, open shirt collar, dank hair, and look of horror at the recollection of what was lying about inside, presented so grotesque an appearance that Shout must needs laugh.

"Oh, Mr. Shout," cried Dubley, "you must not laugh. I do declare you must not laugh."

"Indeed," said Shout, "is it as bad as that?"

"Oh, yes, it's very bad. Come in, Mr. Shout, and don't speak too loud. He may hear you and he may be violent. Oh, Mr. Shout, it's very good of you to come, and such a long distance. Wait. Hush!" said Dubley, clutching Shout by the arm and pulling him away from the room where he had usually seen Delfoy, "not there yet. Let me tell you first what has happened."

With this Dubley led Shout into the pantry, took his hat and stick from him, and offered him the only chair—a low one, that had been cut down at some remote period to form a leg rest and was now used by Dubley for sleeping in when he waited the summons of his master.

"The accommodation is scanty, Mr. Shout," said Dubley. "I mus'n't have my chair too comfortable, you see, else I should sleep too sound. I've not been in bed, Mr. Shout, for a week. That's how you'll excuse my untidy appearance, Mr. Shout. It's not my habit to be untidy I assure you."

Shout listened to this and much more in the shape of apology, reviewed the broken crockery and the mangled food; and, without taking much notice of Dubley's remarks, placidly

took up a fork and rescued a mutton chop from among the bottles of a cruet stand and a confusion of forks and spoons. The act of lifting up the chop disclosed a letter floating in the gravy and Worcester sauce, with the postmark "Madrid" upon it. The letter had been carried in with the breakfast and was now a part of the ruin.

"Now, that's a good chop, Dubley," said Shout, eyeing it as a connoisseur, "a very excellent chop, Dubley, and you say Delfoy won't eat it."

"No, Mr. Shout; he will eat nothing, positively nothing, sir," said Dubley emphatically.

"Then I will, Dubley, for I am hungry after my four hours' railway journey," and Mr. Shout held the chop aloft while Dubley procured a clean plate and spread a napkin on the dresser, and with knife and fork and a bottle of pickles Mr. Shout was served. Shout's eye, however, wandered now and then to the letter from Madrid, and although his thoughts were obviously much occupied with it he made no comment, but silently placed it upright before him, against the bottle of pickles, to drain.

Shout sat on the back of Dubley's chair, or to be more accurate, leaned against it, and remarked as he disposed of the chop that there was no greater mistake in the world than to go without food; that his friend Delfoy was making a very great mistake in refusing to eat his breakfast; and that he was disposed to agree with Dubley that the case of his old friend had become serious.

"Very serious, Mr. Shout; I assure you, very serious. What do you advise?"

"When you have given me a brandy and soda, Dubley, I'll tell you; but, as you know, drinking is equally as necessary as eating for the refreshment of man. I will therefore drink, Dubley."

"In moderation I believe it is, Mr. Shout," said Dubley, who produced the drink with alacrity and attended on his visitor almost as if he had no other concern but Mr. Shout's comforts.

"You see, Dubley," said Shout, swirling the brandy and soda round, and contemplating the whirlpool in his glass in a reflective way, "we must first have a look at him and see what we can do in the way of reasoning with him, eh, Dubley? Don't you think, that's the way?"

"Yes, sir," said Dubley, "it's most desirable. I do assure you I think it quite desirable."

Dubley uttered this with his hands clasped, and eagerly intent upon every motion of his friend and deliverer. Hope, indeed, had begun to revive within him, when suddenly Shout turned round, as he balanced himself against the back of the low chair, and said in a cheery voice:

"Dubley, an idea occurs to me: have you ever thought of the stage as a profession?"

"Dear me, no, sir," exclaimed Dubley, with his hands apart and half uplifted at first in horror at the question in the circumstances, and then a sickly smile overspread his countenance as the footlights flashed upon him and kindled a spasm of ambition. "Oh dear, no, sir," added Dubley, "it would be presumption."

"Not so," said Shout, who had conceived the idea of getting Dubley to represent himself on the stage. He had a part that fitted him exactly, and that would be much improved if Dubley would only impersonate himself in the character. "No, Dubley; you are made for the stage," pursued Shout. "When do you leave here?"

"Ah!" said Dubley, shaking his head solemnly, "that's the unfortunate part of the business—most unfortunate. They say they will remove the effects next week. All the valuables are locked up in the anteroom. That's why you are here now, Mr. Shout, in my pantry It's very terrible."

"Well, then, you will come down to me next week, Dubley, eh?"

"Dear me, no," gasped Dubley. "I mus'n't leave him," and Dubley's horror at the bare thought of leaving Delfoy so much impressed Shout from the managerial point of view that he registered a vow to the shade of Thespis that Dubley should be his dresser and "star" occasionally as the "Unconscious Comic."

Dubley had other views and other thoughts. Timidly but earnestly he inquired:

"Don't you think, Mr. Shout, we should—er—that you should see Mr. Delfoy now?"

"Well, perhaps so," said Shout. "You say he is violent, eh?"

"Very much so upon occasions, Mr. Shout—most violent."

"Then it behoves us to be cautious, eh, Dubley?"

"Yes, sir, if you please," said Dubley.

"And Dubley," said Shout, with his eye on the letter from Madrid, still draining as it stood against the pickle bottle, "we

should inform ourselves. It is our duty to inform ourselves. Your duty as a servant, and mine as a friend. It is not wise to approach a violent man without a knowledge of the causes of his violence. Dubley, my friend, that letter contains information of the cause of his violence, and providentially, Dubley, quite providentially, the Worcester sauce has done its work. We can inform ourselves by the aid of the Worcester sauce and this knife without committing a breach of etiquette or decorum."

So saying Shout wiped the knife on a piece of bread, and taking the envelope, the gum of which had been thoroughly well saturated, he opened it without a flaw.

"This is the work of the terrible Alister," said Shout, looking sternly at Dubley as he unfolded the 'etter—"the goaded Alister—the recreant outlaw. It will contain threats and menaces, against which you will guard your master and I will guard my friend."

He unfolded the letter and laid it out on the dresser. At the first glance he exclaimed:

"I am right. Listen:"

"Betrayer!" he read, "Know that the hand that writes these lines—the hand of the despised and rejected Alister is the same that has compassed your ruin. Though rejected and despised, as I have said, I could still reach you and strike. You used me to gather up your wealth, and then forced me to infamy and disgrace. I have revenged myself. You have many enemies. I have used them. My confidential agent has procured the co-operation of the house of Heritage in the work of your destruction. Ah! you start at that name. You know you have an enemy there, and I know it. Your doom is sealed, for I alone could save you—I,

'THE REJECTED ALISTER.'"

The magniloquent style of the communication was vastly pleasing to the ear of Shout. He delivered it to Dubley as if he had been on the stage. The reference to the name of Heritage was a puzzle to him. Its vagueness seemed to conceal a deep meaning, although, as a matter of fact, it was merely a stray shot based on the modicum of information Newmans had seen fit to impart to his principal. Shout folded the letter again and transferred it to the disfigured envelope, which he closed and wiped down with his table napkin.

"A terrible letter, Dubley," said he. "Let it dry, and hand it to your master when he is in full possession of his five senses, or better, place it in his room and let him come upon it. Now for the rescue, Dubley," continued Shout, rising and leading the way.

Standing outside the door in the dark passage, Shout turned, and assuming a tragic air, put his hand upon Dubley's shoulder, and said in a husky whisper: "Stand you here and wait upon my call."

Dubley motioned assent as Shout grasped the door

handle. He turned it silently, opened the door, and put his head within the room. As he did so a sonorous snore resounded through the chamber. The Member of Parliament was asleep.

Shout brought his head out of the room, closed the door, and walking on tiptoe, led Dubley back to the pantry. Having resumed his former position, he asked Dubley for another brandy and soda, and while it was being produced preserved an attitude of deep thought. When he had fortified himself with the draught Dubley had provided he said, with a solemn shake of the head:

"He's a gorner, Dubley—a clean gorner!"

"Indeed!" said Dubley. "Is it as bad as that, Mr. Shout?"

"Yes," said Shout, "no doubt about it. He was lying on his back in the middle of the room. He had overturned the brandy bottle in his fall, and the liquor was dribbling off the table on to his face. He's a gorner, Dubley, and you'd better come along with me and leave him to the moles and to the bats."

Dubley shook his head.

"No, Mr. Shout," said he, "I cannot leave him. I shall never leave him unless he sends me away.'

"Ah!" said Shout, nodding his head and muttering to himself, "Faithful servant," "Old retainer," "Good for Dubley." Then, rousing himself, he added aloud: "I can do nothing, Dubley. I have come up as you sent for me, but I can do nothing. Nor can you. It cannot last long, and I shall expect you to come to me as soon as you are cast adrift. These are my dates and towns, Dubley, and there's a couple of sovereigns for your expenses in getting to me."

Dubley held the list of dates in one hand and the money in the other, without apparently feeling himself in any way concerned in them, as he said:

"Mr. Shout, I'm much obliged. I cannot bring myself to take the money, because, sir, if I may say so, it seems like believing the worst. I've a little saved, and if you will allow me, Mr. Shout, I'll keep the dates and come if I am cast adrift, which, I trust it will not be the case, Mr. Shout, I do indeed."

For all the completeness of his speech Dubley was much agitated, and Shout observed a tear fall on the list of dates as he folded up the paper. This struck Shout as remarkably fine for effect, and he wondered whether it would be possible to get Dubley to manufacture tears when the situation demanded them. He was afraid not, but was extremely anxious to try, and again and again pressed Dubley to remember that he would be daily and hourly expecting him. Finally he extracted

a promise from Dubley to write to him, however briefly, every other day.

By this time they had reached the front door, when Dubley said:

"Excuse me, Mr. Shout, but is not this a melancholy ending to a great career?"

"Very much so," said Shout.

"I trust it will not be an ending," said Dubley, "but you seem, Mr. Shout, to be so sure about it."

"Yes," said Shout, "not a doubt of it. He'll never pull himself together again."

"Dear me," said Dubley, "I've observed it before—very often I've observed it, if you'll allow me to say so, Mr. Shout."

He seemed anxious to get Shout's permission to proceed, and had assumed his most solemn and impressive manner. Shout nodded approvingly as he said:

"Yes, Dubley, you have observed—"

"That life's a mistake, Mr. Shout, if you will allow me to say so," said Dubley, with a most lugubrious countenance and with his hands down, as if all professional activity had become foolishness and vanity. "I give it up, Mr. Shout, if you allow me to say so. We work and work, and come to a hapex as it were, and when everything has been done, and everything has been accomplished as heart could wish, Mr. Shout, why—off we goes!"

"Ah!" said Shout, "that's your way of interpreting the vanity of human wishes, eh, Dubley?"

"Well, Mr. Shout, if you are pleased to say so," said Dubley, and then with renewed earnestness and that look of supreme anxiety with which he always delivered his philosophical reflections, he added: "I can assure you, Mr. Shout, as you are pleased to interest yourself in me, that if I was to marry, as I have proposed to myself, and the young woman is quite ready, and was to take a cigar shop in Piccadilly Circus, as I have proposed, and quite within my means, I believe I should die or go off somehow the very next week. It's always so. We seem never to get there, Mr. Shout—the hapex, I mean, Mr. Shout—but what off we goes!"

With this parting reflection the door closed and Shout went out into the sunshine, revolving the concerns of the Cæsar Borgia Company, while Dubley returned to his pantry to ruminate on the terrible presence on the other side of the passage.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE REAPING.

TIME passes, the seasons come and go, and in due time the harvest is reaped, but the tares are reaped as well as the wheat, and the reaping never ends.

. . . . . .

Happiest among all the recollections that awakened the thankfulness of Morris Heritage was the thought that Philip had never known the whole truth as to his parentage. The subject was never once again referred to between them, and in time the remembrance faded, and was shrouded over by the stronger growth of hallowed memories of better things. Still, it had become necessary, as occasion warranted, to set out the facts so far as they were known, as the relations between Philip and the Lady Alice became more fully recognised. Of course the Countess was terribly shocked, or found it convenient to be so, when the circumstance was made known to her that something very like a bar sinister would have been on Philip's escutcheon if he had been blest with one; and when it became known to her that Lady Alice was bent on marrying her new member, the absence of any escutcheon whatever was regarded by the fractious lady as a more grievous offence than any conceivable blemish could be upon emblems whose antiquity could not be questioned, no matter whether the blemish had been the fruit of an act of yesterday or of a hundred years before, and the Lady Bolore was much concerned about the view Society would take of the matter.

The Right Hon. Peter, however, who had gradually emerged from the seclusion into which his indiscretions in the mercantile world had forced him, and had hopes of a new flight in the political arena unencumbered by Stock Exchange drawbacks, took a different view of the question. The Right Hon. Peter was one of those who always regard the good or ill fortune of others in no other light than in the way it affects their precious selves, and he became an ardent supporter of

the Lady Alice's scheme so soon as he had made up his mind that Philip would be a far more agreeable and obedient nephew than a person of great family, who would make a point of looking down upon him and snubbing him at every convenient opportunity, and might even decline his services as a trustee, which to the Right Hon. Peter would have been a calamity of the first magnitude.

Accordingly the family lawyer was called in and settlements were discussed, and the Right Hon. Peter conferred with Morris Heritage and the family solicitor about the bend sinister; and for the before-mentioned reasons the Right Hon. Peter made light of it, and pooh-poohed the family solicitor, who regarded the infraction of the law inherited by Philip with as much gravity as if he had in his own proper person committed high treason, but who, having delivered himself with much emphasis on the subject, was content in the end to give his advice and thereafter take his instructions without more ado.

So as the time passed and the seasons followed each other, and the ripe fruit fell, there came the sound of marriage bells beneath a summer sky, and bonfires were set a-blazing on Gilton Common, and there was rejoicing at Bramley Down, and happiness unalloyed was once more the lot of Muriel.

When Philip and his bride had been many days upon their way abroad, his mother sat with Heritage on the high-built terrace of their new home, and a golden sunset tinted the landscape of Bramley Down, and there lay upon her lap a twice read letter from her boy.

He had written in the full-time glory of the happiest hours of his life—happier than he had ever been—happier than he could ever hope to be at any time to come; and the glorious truth sparkled in the record of every trivial incident upon the road they had travelled, and even put an aureola round the brow of Mr. Bowdler, M.P., studying art at Rome.

It was here duly reported of Mr. Bowdler that he had not only acquired a taste for art, but that his political views had undergone a change. He now ceased to believe in the perfection of those natures in whose behalf he had hitherto burnt the midnight oil and wrecked the finest constitution that was ever vouchsafed to mortal man. He complained of ingratitude, and sought consolation in the study of the treasures to be found on the site of the ancient mistress of the world.

Heritage was tempted to give utterance to some wholesome

cynicisms over this choice declaration, but he was thwarted by a whisper from Muriel as she gazed wistfully over the landscape.

"We are all very happy now. Look, Morris, there are the girls. They are happier."

It was quite true. The country life had worked a change in Dora. The activity, the novelty, the varying moods of the sky and air, and the habits of the living things that now surrounded her had checked her brooding and destroyed her false philosophy. She had become less imperious, and especially more gentle to Ethel, who, always responsive, had grown more confident.

It did not appear that Mr. Bowdler, in his burst of confidence to Philip, had confided to him the particulars of his visit to Messrs. Robez with his friend Newmans and the doctor. What the doctor had to do with the matter puzzled Newmans very much, for he was left outside the banker's in the cab, and had no knowledge of the business they had come to transact. Bowdler, however, regarded the doctor as a sort of watchdog, who would assist him in the event of Newmans endeavouring to get away with the all-important documents before the transaction was completed.

Once inside the bankers' and standing at the counter, Bowdler had no need of the doctor, and the business was transacted with strict regard to the programme he had laid down. In the first place Newmans produced the bill, and handed it to Bowdler for endorsement. A letter of instructions had already been sent to Messrs. Robez, requiring them to transfer the sums due to each to their house of Robez in Paris, and accordingly they were each presented with his own banker's draft, and felt almost happy for the first time for a month. Their emotion was far too big for speech, and it was not until they were half-way across the Channel that they felt really at ease. Bowdler admirably expressed the sentiments of both when he said, with a huge cigar in his mouth, as they sat on the deck of the steamer:

"Upon my soul, Newmans, old man, fresh air's a great blessing!"

Newmans still remains on the Continent, and he has not thought it worth while to make the necessary sacrifices to procure rehabilitation. He, however, found the society of Bowdler irksome on account of his constant references to the large sum he had made by sitting still and seeing him work; and he also

had a desire to return to the circle he had left in Madrid and excite the envy of his companions by his improved position. He never explained to Alister in detail how he had encompassed the downfall of his enemy, and certainly not what he had gained by it. He romanced a little on the subject, and although Alister was moderately delighted with the result, he had some misgivings as to the candour of his friend of the Prado. Messrs. Bell, the bankers, however, regarded Mr. Newmans with unbounded respect.

Time passed badly for some, and brought with it wretchedness and grief, the reapings of the evil deeds of others. Mr. and Mrs. Chippering did not survive the shock of their daughter's indiscretion, and Mr. Marmaduke Bray earned the reward of his infamy by marrying Mrs. Delfoy as soon as the law allowed. As Mr. Chippering had omitted to alter his will she came into possession of a considerable sum of money, and this perhaps stimulated Mr. Bray's sense of honour. He discharges his obligations to the lady who has sacrificed so much for him by condescending to live under the same roof with her; but he does not appear to be more attentive to her than her former husband had been, and is frequently abroad in public places—at dinner parties and in drawing-rooms, where he gratifies his passion for declamation. His wife finds what consolation she can in the knowledge that she provides him with an income to enable him the more abundantly to pursue his fascinating course. Some people say he is lucky, but that is doubtful.

Time passes and seasons follow each other, and must follow still, before the reaping is finished; and for some the harvest is more terrible than lips can speak or the mind conceive. There are moving among us day by day in this great city of London (unparalleled in the history of the world for its wealth and power among the people of the earth) some so very poor and so abject in their poverty that they seem scarcely human. Among these, the most abject, the most foul, the most terribly sunken beyond all power of recall,are some certain sorts of men, who, varying in age as in stature and complexion and origin, move among us—more often by night than by day—scantily clothed, halting of foot, unshorn, unwashed, and utterly wretched. Their means of subsistence is less obvious than that of the pariah dog. Dirt is an essential part of their economy, for it checks waste and reduces the necessity of food. So long as the demands of hunger are

silenced by nicotine, and the nerves are excited by alcohol, they endure existence, and even seem to hope.

The most active and least despicable among them appear at one's door upon alighting from a luggage-laden cab. Whence they come, and how they develop, as it were, from out of the very stones, with their hunger-haunted faces and ravenous eyes, none can tell. Where they burrow at all other times none may know, for the knowledge would be infamous. Still, these are not hopeless. They have some strength of limb, and hope cannot have left them or they would not run. Others of a bolder sort hover at the doors of theatres, and levy contributions (by provocation and the dislike of abuse) for services undesired and often unrendered. Many of these would be criminal if they dared; but they have some courage, and take rank among the outcasts of the city above the wretch who shuffles along the edge of the pavement with his hands in his pockets and his head bent towards the ground as he searches the kennels of the city at the break of day.

His work lasts but for an hour or two. It begins about that time when the last debauchee and the last harlot disappear from the hideous night, and ends with the first sign of active city life. The gutter searcher moves along with eager restlessness from place to place, and his hopes of profit lie in the fruits of that indolence or recklessness which comes of seeking pleasures in the lurid night. He can tell you to a nicety where most of those who "know what they are about" are sublimely indifferent to a few coins more or less accidentally scattered on the ground, to be lost in the darkness and gleaned by the gutter searcher at the dawn of day—a miserable gleaning of unconsidered trifles to be rescued from garbage and spent upon gin.

Among the latest recruits to this fearful tribe is Geoffrey Delfoy, aforetime Member of Parliament, and once owner of the estates of Hanswick and Luckross and the manor of Santrail. His old masterful manner has acquired for him a beat in which he is unmolested by his brother pariahs. It is the most fruitful of any in the city, and the most destructive: for it is part of the fate of these wretches to die speedily, in proportion as they have means to satisfy their craving for drink. Geoffrey Delfoy's thirst is, as it ever was, for brandy. There had been times in his life, epochs of great moment, when he had resisted the disposition to rely on stimulant, and had thrust the temptation aside as an enemy to success. This is no longer so.

He practically lives on alcohol, and his end cannot be far distant.

The world, as he once knew it, has forgotten him. He has gone down, and is remembered only as a name in public records, and in his personality but by a very few. He has passed out of the small circle of the wealthy and influential in which he moved, and is now lost in the oblivion of squalor. Knowledge of his deeds remains hidden with him. So far as the world is concerned, he has never been found out. He has perhaps never found himself out. Even the origin of his misfortune has been concealed from him. The names of those he chooses to regard as his enemies he mutters in his wanderings, and the monotony of his blasphemies is relieved by the aimless execration of those whom he has wronged. The names of Alister, of Heritage, and even of the gentle Muriel, embody to his frenzy the authors of his chastisement, and the very demons of the air that pursue him as he wanders through the night. Never for a moment has he recognised that these victims of his malice had been but puny instruments for his destruction, so long as the guard of self-control had regulated his ambitions and his acts. Never for a moment had he felt that for villainy to succeed there must be allied with malicious caution and reckless daring the same iron grip of self-restraint which guides the virtuous to honourable achievement and kind repose. He had laughed at attacks from his fellows, and had ignored the first conditions of successful warfare with the world; but the inexorable laws of the God of the whole earth have moved on in their unerring and resistless course, and the canker of selfishness has led him to his destruction.

The finite man, corrupt at his heart's core, has devised and schemed, as the evil in man can, for ends that never satisfy, and for the realisation of hopes that fade many days before they are deplored as a mirage by the selfishness that imagined them. The poorer and less abundantly endowed of his fellow-creatures envy the apparent successes of this monument of corruption; they are dazzled by the glitter of his magniloquence and by his profusion, and encourage an impotent envy, not unmixed with awe, at what the criminal daring of their idol for the moment has achieved; but the Omniscient Hand is ever outstretched above them, and the lines are set. Whence they come, whither they lead, and why the insolent brutality

of an essentially evil nature should prevail for a single moment upon this fair earth is the problem we cannot solve. And why the Sacrifice of Self—the very essence and spirit of the Christ—should so often be but an immolation at the feet of triumphant evil is the greatest mystery of life.

Is it not gratifying to learn from these pages that at least one of these undetected criminals whose craft and malice have been hidden from the world should be now suffering as no jail can make man suffer, and to whom the gallows would be an instrument of mercy?

THE END.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE ATHENÆUM, *reviewing the year* 1892, *says*—"*In his recently published story*, The Veiled Hand, *Mr. Wicks revealed himself as a writer of quite uncommon subtlety and strength.*"

Concurrently with the issue of the Fourth and Popular Edition of "The Veiled Hand" at 3s. 6d., a Special Edition has been prepared, printed on large paper and bound in full calf extra, with rough edges and gilt tops, price 16s.

EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS OF 'THE VEILED HAND.'

The Athenæum says—

There is a completeness and rotundity in the delineation of the characters, which gives them the air of being types of humanity rather than individuals, though at the same time their dramatic individuality is not sacrificed. Thus it is not the passing interest in fraudulent or idiotic directors, large though it may be, that renders the book great, but the feeling that the particular form of villainy or folly attributed to these men is merely an accident, and not of the essence of their presentation. . . . In reading it one is reminded more than anything else of Thackeray's wonderfully broad and true pictures of manners, and of Thackeray's genius for universalising the snob and artistically glorifying the flunkey. It would follow, then, that it is totally unlike any other English novels of the present day. These are, broadly speaking, of two classes: the study of character, a novel of which Mr. Meredith is the chief exponent, or the book of adventure, which depends almost exclusively on plot, wherein lies Mr. Stevenson's chief claim to distinction. But since Thackeray there has hitherto been no considerable writer of the novel of manners which describes a state of society rather than an individual character. *The Veiled Hand*, likewise, deals with very much the same society as Thackeray delighted in—the proud, impecunious, and foolish inheritor of a long line of ancestors; the cool, cynical villain, succeeding by irreproachable manners and unscrupulous employment of more stupid villains as his tools; the gentleman's gentleman, calm and imperturbable, with his consoling tags of commonplace philosophy; the Bohemian in chambers, who combines with his one enthusiasm, the stage, a laxity of principles which permits him to earn money for it by any dirty job; and a host of others whom it would be tedious to enumerate. The heroine, also, by her insipidity, reminds one of the Lauras and Amelias who are the weakest point of Thackeray's novels. Indeed, if it were not for the well-known veracity of title pages, and the allusions in the latter part to such modern institutions as School Boards and South African mines, the reader would be tempted to suppose that the book had been written thirty years ago, under the full inspiration of Thackeray's genius. It is not, however, intended to suggest that Mr. Wicks servilely copies Thackeray's methods, and is devoid of originality; he resembles him because he treats of much the same sort of people, and, like Thackeray, looks at Society from the point of view of the good-humoured cynic. . . . It would be difficult to praise the style too highly: it is quite in the grand manner, broad, deliberate, and uninterrupted. The language is terse, crisp, witty, but the narrative is never hurried; indeed, to the present generation accustomed to take their fiction in small and strong doses, the book may seem too long; but this length has the advantage of satisfying the desire for completeness, which is merely tickled by the *hors d'œuvres* of modern fiction. The digressions are not infrequent, but they are never out of place, and hardly a word is wasted; one feels, in reading the book, as in that of any true artist, that there is a reserve of force out of sight—that much more might have been said, but that the writer has rigidly confined himself to the absolutely necessary. . . . One of the best scenes in the book—too long, however

for quotation in this review—is that describing the death of George Adolphus Leuchars Delfoy, Jun. It begins with an admirable bit of fooling, and leads up, with a marvellously dramatic abruptness, to the fatal ending of a drunken frolic. In the artist, M. Jean de Paleologue, the author has secured a most valuable ally. The numerous sketches which illustrate the work are not all equal in merit, but most of the principal characters are admirably rendered. Among the best, we should pick out the large illustration called "Filial Restraint," and "A Formal Introduction," together with the sketch of M. Blanché, and of George Augustus suffering from an unquenchable thirst.

The Saturday Review says—

A new work by Mr. Wicks is an exception to the rule upon which the average modern novel is constructed. The incidents packed into *The Veiled Hand* are very numerous and dramatic. His plot, which is exceedingly ingenious, involves a wide variety of urgent topics, all of which Mr. Wicks treats with familiarity, shrewdness, and vivacity. The Legislators, who are endeavouring to devise means by which the British public may be protected from adventurers under the Limited Liability Acts, will find in the chapters narrating the rise and fall of the Great Coradell Company, as much inspiration as they are likely to derive from many rumination in committee. The chapters dealing with the great strike in the coalfields are equally instructive. . . . and Mr. Wicks will have contributed much to the services of man if his novel makes the proletarist familiar with the "true inwardness" of the movements to which they lend themselves when high-strung knights of labour take the field. It must not be supposed, however, that *The Veiled Hand* is a didactic work. Incidentally it is capable of teaching much which the community would profit by knowing; but this teaching is casual only, and subservient always to Mr. Wicks's purpose, which is to tell a story with the thoroughness of treatment in detail which a plot such as his demands. In the matter of construction *The Veiled Hand* is extremely skilful.

The Times says—

A wide field lies open to the novelist who sets himself to expose the trickery and fraud of company promoting and company directing. Such is the theme which inspires the caustic pen of Mr. Frederick Wicks, already known as the author of more than one vivacious novel in which roguery plays an important part. In *The Veiled Hand* he is specially severe upon that combination of the politician and the company-monger of which we have latterly had so many shining examples in our own and in other countries. Mr. Wicks has evidently seen—as a disgusted witness, no doubt—a great deal of the inner working of the great modern engine of fraud. *The Veiled Hand*, a domestic drama extending through three decades, relates the rise and fall of a subtle Iago who piles up a colossal fortune by pulling the wires of limited liability from a secure position in the background. Mr. Delfoy's name never comes before the public. But he manages, with consummate address, all the apparatus of the company promoter—the dummy vendor, the confederated solicitors, the financial journalist, the guinea-pig directors, the "independent" experts, the rich sample of ore, and all the rest of it. . . . . Many scenes could be enumerated from Mr. Wicks's novel which, in the essential satire of the situations, and in the spirit in which they are described, would not disgrace the best English satirists. Of such are the first meeting of the subscribers to the Great Coradell (Limited), the Countess of Bolore's garden-party, and the appeal issued on behalf of the Unusual Morality Society—which last exposes very neatly the methods by which charity canvassers work upon the snobbishness of the public. . . . Mr. Wicks has really given us an amusing and highly seasonable story, which is none the less pleasing because embellished with numerous illustrations from the clever pen of Mr. Jean de Paleologue.

Vanity Fair says—

Mr. Frederick Wicks has again written a book which, for interest

and abiding value, deserves a high place. . . . *The Veiled Hand* tells a story marked by the qualities at once of photographic fidelity and artistic selection. It is full of honest work without being laboured; it is shrewdly, sometimes even mercilessly, observant without preaching the decadent gospel of pessimism, and above all it has that essential quality which so many modern novelists seem to avoid as a damning literary crime—namely, exceeding interest in the conception and evolution of the story as such. The sub-title of the book is "A Novel of the Sixties, the Seventies, and the Eighties," and no one will deny that the author has taken hold of two of the most prominent developments of social relationship of this period in the apotheosis of the plutocrat and the descent on the city of the aristocrat. No small part of the interest of the story centres in the formation and fortunes of the Great Coradell Copper Mining Company, Limited; and the strange companionship thereby engendered of the aristocrat, the stockbroker, the solicitor, the financial Pressman, and the "nominal vendor," provides Mr. Wicks with excellent material, of which he makes most excellent use. Another product of this age is the professional agitator, and in "the notorious Bowdler" we are presented with a creation which we would fain hope is not typical, which we are inwardly convinced is so, and which, whether or no, is extremely entertaining. By far the strongest portrait is that of Geoffrey Delfoy, the gambler in love, in money, in politics, and in the reputation of men and women; a man who, having divested himself of the inconvenient attributes of heart and conscience, moves from poverty to the verge of vast wealth through the ruin of others with the relentless concentration of a chess-player, who sacrifices his pawns the better to attack his adversary's king. Muriel, the good woman of the story, is somewhat colourless; but it is at least an arguable retort that good women are not infrequently characterised by negative and passive excellences. The book is a workmanlike production, to be classed not only among "Books to Read," but also among "books to buy." The drawings by M. Jean de Paleologue are very clever and genuinely illustrative.

The Daily Telegraph says—

The plot of this ingenious fiction is at least as elaborate as any to be found in the earlier works of Sue, De Balzac, or Dumas the elder.

The Echo, in an article on "Morals and Manners," by Meliorist, says—

Mr. Wicks has attempted a task worthy of the highest gifts of genius. Zola has attempted it for France. . . . It (*The Veiled Hand*) is full of ability, with frequent displays of a higher quality than ability. There are in it incidents, characters, situations, dialogues enough to stock three novels. Dickens himself would have laughed over, and might have owned, the rollicking, extravagant humour of Mr. Wicks's description of the pork-butcher, Mr. Joy, in the crush at the bank and in the bosom of his family. The dialogues, especially the cynical ones, are extraordinarily clever. The scenes in which lawyer sharks, Stock Exchange thieves, company promoters, intriguing M.P.'s of the "Labour" Party, are drawn, are vivid and powerful, and reveal an intimate and profound knowledge of the shady aspects, at least, of contemporary life. Bearing in mind, then, that Mr. Wicks has selected his incidents from one manifestation only of the modern movement—and that, if socialism be more than an empty name, only a transient manifestation—his readers may accept him as a safe critic on the ground which he has occupied. For the burden of this novelist-preacher's message to his generation is the vulgarising and de-humanising, socially debasing, and ruinous effect of the race for wealth. Mr. Wicks is a strong hater (none the worse for that). He hates the brutalising Materialism of the day, and with such intensity that the preacher sometimes swamps the artist. He hates the Materialistic creed and practice, that man is one appendage of wealth, instead of wealth being the servant of man. . . . There can be no doubt that, as far as it goes, this account of interaction between commercial politics and social demoralisation is correct. Mammon has been vulgarising all ranks of the community. Chippering, M.P., the vulgar,

illiterate haberdasher, whose influence with the Whips is set forth by the satirist, has his dittoes—and many of them—in the Parliament which has just met.

The Western Morning News, under the title, "A Notable Novel," says—

'At a time when people are deploring the decadence of English fiction, and asking who are to fill the proud position formerly held by such writers as Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot, it is pleasant to come across a novel displaying many of the best traits of famous English novelists. . . . Related in masterly style, wit and humour, sarcasm, knowledge of human nature, and the philosophy that comes of experience being prominently exhibited in this very remarkable novel. Many of the passages are as good as anything to be found in "Vanity Fair," and there is not the slightest exaggeration in saying that the chapter headed "A Party of Eight" is one of the very best things in English fiction. . . . The book will take high rank as a description of some of the social follies and hypocrisies of the day.

The National Review says—

The Veiled Hand is Zolaesque in the thoroughness of its mastery of detail. . . . Mr. Wicks is painstaking, vivid, and entertaining. . . . *The Veiled Hand* is a highly superior work. The plot of it is ingenious and engaging; the characters and the incidents are well under control; the writing, in which there are only a few flaws, is sound and almost constantly brilliant. Many of the chapters are humorous in a measure and in a manner which would have done credit to Dickens; the pages sparkle with epigrams; and frequently, as by a flash of lightning in the gloom, we are startled by some philosophical reflection deep enough and wise enough to make Mr. Meredith pause and admire.

The Gentleman's Magazine says—

Like the early works of Dickens, *The Veiled Hand* is a microcosm, embodying representatives of many of the characters that make up the macrocosm. Here are characters good, bad, earnest, shifty, wise, foolish, amusing to the moralist, or depressing—all involved in one great undertaking which is to bring fortune and happiness to some, and ruin and death to others. What, however, is most striking is the relentless light poured upon City speculations, men of highest positions and responsibility being shown as involved in one huge fraud, the full extent of which is not easily estimated. The tortuous and underground manner in which this is wrought is shown with remarkable skill and knowledge of the world.

The Liverpool Courier says—

This is a strong and well-written novel, which, in some of its phases—particularly in the more humorous passages and dialogues in which the author cleverly allows the characters of his dramatis personæ to unfold themselves to the reader—reminds one occasionally of Charles Dickens. The work has, however, a striking vein of originality. Though the main incidents of the story are not unconventional, both the style in which they are treated, and the way in which they are elaborated, are remarkable in a high degree, and confer upon the book and its author an individuality which cannot fail to leave a marked impression upon the reader. Mr. Wicks's characters are of a pronounced type, but they are not exaggerated, and they act in relation to the extraordinary circumstances in which they are implicated most rationally. In the whole range of fiction it would be safe to say there is not a better-drawn scoundrel than the villain of this story, and there are few, if any, whose machinations have been depicted upon such a large scale, cleverly marked out, but destined in the end to compass the destruction of their author. . . . One noteworthy excellence of Mr. Wicks's new work is, that the whole develops within the reader's cognisance, there is no retrospection and no resort to any incident occurring at a date prior to that at which the story opens. . . . The work is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and clever contributions to modern fiction.

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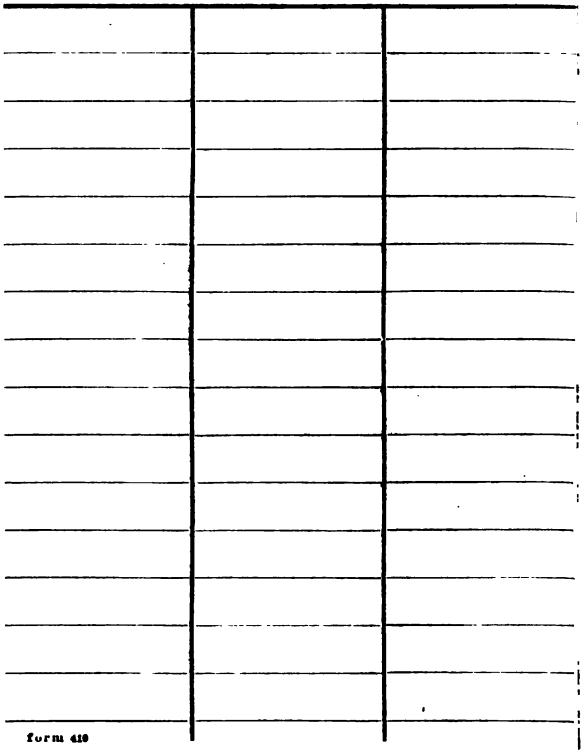

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